Hyouketsu Kyoukai no Eden Volume 5

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絶対聖域
氷結鏡界のエデン5

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氷結鏡界のエデン5
絶対聖域

「巫女としてじゃなく、幼なじみとして何もできないのが悔しいの」

真夜中に突然やってきたユミィを前に、シェルティスは微笑む。

――ユミィが頼ってくれる。それだけで、僕には充分だから。

浮遊島事件の真実をあかすため、統政庁を訪れた天結宮の巫女・ユミィとシェルティスたち。しかし、双方の主張は食い違うばかり。

そんな中、錬護士筆頭イシュタルが全ての事象を記録する統政庁の秘宝『ミクヴァの緋眼』への強制接触を提案。さらにユミィに巫女として決断を迫る――危険な任務を誰に託すのか、と。一方、沁力術士『黄金のマハ』とイグニドも、統政庁に姿を現す……。

己の〝絶対の聖域〟を護るために闘う、重層世界ファンタジー。

5

絶対聖域

氷結鏡界のエデン

細音 啓
KEI SAZANE

ファンタジア文庫

……これ以上近づくとエルベルト共鳴が。
沁力（しんりょく）と魔笛（まてき）の拒絶反応で、互いが傷つく。
わかっていても、とめられなかった。

氷結鏡界のエデン

5 絶対聖域

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浮遊大陸における二大組織関係図（オービエ・クレア）

天結宮（ソフィア）
巫女を頂点とし、結界を司る

不対立感と信立感

統政庁（とうせいちょう）
元老院を頂点とし、政治・経済を司る

天結宮は、浮遊大陸の守護女神というべき巫女を頂くため、民衆から熱狂的に支持されている。統政庁は社会基盤を担っているが、地味な役割故に天結宮の影に隠れることが多い。二つの組織は昔から緊迫した関係にあったが、統政庁領の浮遊島に天結宮が無断で侵入したとして、対立の溝を深めている

天結宮の祈り手と護士たち

結界の巫女

幽幻種から大陸を守る結界を担う存在。交代で氷結鏡界の結界を維持している

巫女の2位
メイメル・イン・カーネイション

巫女の4位
春蕾・ピア・ヌクレネン

護士候補生 モニカ部隊

巫女の専属護衛・千年獅の卵でもある。巫女や、天結宮全体の護衛を担う

モニカ・イスペラント

華宮

ヴァイエル・バッハベル

巫女の5位

ユミィ・エル・スフレニクトール
Ymy Ele Soufflenictole

洗礼系の沁力を得意とする
優しい少女。シェルティスの
幼なじみであり、
現在は専属護衛をもたない

必ずたどり着く。
――君の待つ場所へ。

Story & Characters

【あらすじ&登場人物紹介】

幽幻種と呼ばれる存在に侵攻を受ける世界。巫女の祈る守護結界に守られた浮遊大陸オービエ・クレアでのみ、人は生きることができた。
大陸の外――穢歌の庭(エデン)に堕ち、禁断の呪力を宿したシェルティス。彼はその秘密を抱えたまま、幼なじみの巫女・ユミィの専属護衛・千年獅を目指し、護士候補生・モニカ、華宮、ヴァイエルと共に部隊を結成する。候補生同士の部隊戦を勝ち抜き、統政庁との会合へ赴くユミィの護衛任務を勝ち取ったシェルティス。しかし、この統政庁での会合は、何か裏がありそうで……

異端の少年／護士候補生

シェルティス・マグナ・イール
Sheltis Magna Yehle

双剣使いの少年。
穢歌の庭に落下したことで、
禁断の呪力・魔笛(まてき)を
その身に宿した

Prologue – Just the Two in the Slowly Darkening Tower

A red world.

The brown of the earth was outdone by the even stronger red of dusk.

The then and long shadows of a grove of trees stretched endlessly. The ground was fanned up by the wind and the small pebbles underfoot rolled around with a dull clacking noise.

That was, that kind of image of a wasteland———

.

The boy wordlessly held his twin swords.

"……"

His ragged breathing slowly returned to normal.

He had reddish brown messy hair and eyes which gave an affable impression. His age was thirteen or fourteen. As fitting of a teenage boy, his limbs gave off a somewhat slender feeling as he breathed out.

Upon the black formal wear draped upon him, there were little cuts all over the place. Beneath the formal wear, his T-shirt was also torn and something red was flowing from the bare skin peeking out from there.

Feeling fatigue and his wounds, even then his vision was focused straight ahead———

On his opponent who confronted him with a pearl grey metallic lance readied.

"_____"

His opponent maintained a position with the spear larger than her own height held over her head, not moving a muscle.

Breathing or blinking, not even a slight twitching of the body.

One minute passed……two minutes……three minutes passed and there was still no movement.

Perfect stillness. There was not a single breath, blink or twitch.

"_____"

The golden hair of the girl who had her spear readied fluttered in the wind.

Her clothes were black just like the boy's. But hers was a single thin shirt that exposed up to her shoulders. Her age was about sixteen or seventeen, some years above that of the pre-teen boy. Her slender body was about a fist taller than the boy's as well.

The girl with the blue eyes stared fixedly at the boy without moving.

The boy facing her also wasn't moving.

An instant.

A small pebble in the space between the two rolled away after being struck by a sudden gust.

The two separated from silence at the same time in an instant.

With vigor that raised gusts at his feet, the boy swung his twin swords. The spear-wielding girl received that and put power into both hands———

.

"I quit～"

The girl lowered her spear and relaxed her body.

The boy who saw that ceased his movement reflexively.

"……Eh?"

His mouth hung open in a childish expression that suited his age.

"……You're……quitting?"

"Today, Sheltis-kun doesn't have enough vigor so it's bo～ring."

"……Uh, ……umm."

The girl who swung her spear with just a flick of the wrist announced that without even turning around. On the other hand, the boy who was the recipient ——— Sheltis meekly bowed his head.

"Sorry……"

"Did you have a fight with Leon-kun or something?"

"Ah, th-that's wrong. I always fight with Leon."

"Then what iiis it?"

"……Err……well……a childhood friend got mad at me, Ymy's her name……"

"You idiot. That's the un-Guard-like point about you."

The phrase spoken by the girl who only turned halfway.

Raising the corners of her mouth while looking down ——— it was a very, very challenging smile.

"There's too much of an inconsistency in your strength and emotions, you know?"

"That's the same for you, Ishtar. **Doing that kind of feigned innocence**."

Even though he replied with a pout, her challenging smile only deepened.

"Ishtar is di——fferent"

"How so?"

He didn't think a reply would come. The reason for that was that countless people had asked her the same thing and it had ended with just a smile.

But just this time was different.

"The summit I'm aiming for is different."

"……?"

Sheltis blinked in surprise when she suddenly muttered that sentence.

"Say, Sheltis-kun, do you want to be a Sennenshi?"

He couldn't immediately answer in response to her sudden question.

"Do you want to be a Sennenshi?"

"Wh-what are you———"

"I'm asking if you want to be a Sennenshi."

"……I will become one."

Not want to, will.

That was the boy's resolve.

"Fuun, then what if you do your best? I'll be stopping here anyway."

The girl once again turned her back.

She left behind a slight, truly slight smile.

"I'm fine with being an Elite Guard right now. I have no interest in being a Sennenshi." [1]

"……Why?"

The boy stood still with a dumbfounded expression.

Within the tower called Tenketsu Palace, the Sennenshi who were known as the Priestesses' partners. If it were her ——— if it were Ishtar Sophia, then she was undoubtedly capable of reaching that honored position.

Even so, she was discarding that opportunity and honor herself?

"It's fine if you become a Sennenshi. That or Leon-kun ……either way isn't bad."

"Ishtar, what are you planning?"

He narrowed his eyes and gazed at her.

……I don't understand why.

It had been that way ever since they'd met; he had absolutely no idea what she was thinking. He had no idea how much of what she said was serious and he still didn't know exactly how strong she was as a spear user.

No, rather than that, those frivolous words just now——

"Plotting? What a way you're putting it——"

Maybe she laughed since her shoulders shook a little.

"I said so, didn't I, that the summits we're aiming for are different. They're completely different."

"The summits are different……"

"I've already obtained it. The Elite Guard position is enough."

Elite Guard ——— those whose abilities stood out even within the tower and, at the same time, those from

whom the Priestesses would choose their Sennenshi. She had advanced that far but was forsaking the crucial Sennenshi position.

"Then, bye-bye——! See you next time!"

She left with a lovely wink.

Sheltis tried posing a question just once more to that slender back.

"Ishtar……what is your goal?"

There was no answer.

The girl ignored the question like she'd felt a gentle breeze ——— the moment he thought that. For only an instant, her footsteps stopped.

.

"**Well then, boy, will you ask forcefully?**"

.

———Crish.

When he noticed it, Sheltis had already taken one step back.

"Oh my, what's wro——ng?"

Her smiling face half-turned towards him.

Facing that head-on, he openly grimaced.

"……I don't like you; you feign innocence and then suddenly show your true colors."

"What are you talking about? Ishtar has no ide——a."

Swinging her arms in an adorable manner, this time she left.

"……Fight and win if you want to know, huh."

Staring at her back, Sheltis softly whispered.

"I got it. I'll do my best next time."

.

But the promised second battle didn't come to pass.

After a month. The boy fell from the floating continent Orbie Clar to the far below Garden of Corrupted Song. Eden

And Ishtar———

Chapter 1: Expedition

Part 1

"Hey, hey, Sheltis, are you done yet――?"

A nonchalant voice echoed in the room that had become littered with clothes and small articles.

"Just a little longer."

"Stiiiill?"

"That's why I said, just a little longer."

"Then I'll count to ten……get set, 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0, and done."

"So fast!?"

Stopping his hands that were busy packing things in his travel bag, Sheltis turned around without thinking.

He had reddish brown hair and affable eyes. He was seventeen, his limbs gave off a somewhat slender feeling as he breathed out and he still had a slight feeling of leftover innocence.

"One second didn't even pass by just now, right!?"

"*I said I'd count to ten～, nothing about ten seconds*"

Machine Ilis crystal lay beside the pillow on the bed, looking small. The vivid yellow blinking of its crystal portion was a sign indicating, "*be concerned about it, be concerned about it*".

"……What is that child-like twisting of words?"

"*I just have that much leisure. Sheltis, haven't you been ignoring me while you were packing your bag since a while ago ? Ilis has become so lonely, she might cry.*"

"Nah, this isn't in the realm of ignoring."

He gazed at the clock at a corner of the table.

The time displayed on its digital screen was exactly nine in the morning.

"Oh crap……it's already the gathering time. I'm not done packing yet!?"

"*Come on, Sheltis, the airship bound for the Governmental Sector departs at nine and a half. Weren't you told to gather at the airport on the tower's sixty-fifth floor at nine?*"

"If you know that, then won't you stoooooop!?"

"*The one who made a schedule which looked like it would end in being late was Sheltis.*"

"……The one at fault is the Instructor."

He had been caught yesterday evening by Instructor Yumelda who was known for her demonic training. For ages after that, he had been subjected to grueling training under the name of coaching until this morning.

"If you're going to go on an expedition to the Governmental Sector, then I'll hammer that portion's worth into you ahead of time……isn't that strange?"

"*The Instructor was quite lively though——, so it seemed fun.*"

"……It was definitely the height of tension. She was smiling so widely."

He had truly felt scared when she started swinging around her trademark black whip and laughing, " Ahahahahahahaa!" deep into the night.

"*So is this okay? You'll be late at this rate.*"

"That's right, that's what I said!"

He started shoving whatever he grabbed into his travel bag. There were the machinery and equipment used for guarding VIPs, his change of clothes for the trip and other simple things like emergency rations.

"*Hey, hey, Sheltis? What about that book I said I wanted to read if we had time?*"

"I want to bring it, but no! I don't have the time to pack something like that!"

"*Eh——. No, no, then let's bring something else. Ilis thinks it'd be great to bring a giant rocket launcher and machine gun. I also can't give up on a flamethrower.*"

"I think those would be confiscated at the Governmental Sector's airport though……rather, stop bothering me!"

Just when he was about to silence machine crystal (Ilis) who was atop the bed———

The small sound of knocking came from the door.

"Sheltis, are you still here?"

"……Monica? Ah, wait, wait, I'll open it now!"

She stood at the mechanical door that had opened.

A girl with a slender body whose long sakura-colored hair was bound into one lock behind her. Her grey eyes which showed the strength of her willpower looked really attractive on her graceful face.

Monica Esperanto.

Her age was one above his at eighteen and was the unit captain that governed their unit. On her waist holder were two blackened crossed rods (Rosario) and her clothes consisted of the usual formal wear.

"……How rare."

Staying standing in the door, that was the first thing that she murmured.

"It's the first time I've seen you wear the formal wear."

"Yeah, well. It's one thing inside the tower, but I don't want to be suspicious over there."

He tugged a little on the cuff of his pure-white formal wear that didn't have a single wrinkle. He had always been wearing the black retired formal wear as a jacket habitually, but it really wouldn't do to go to the Governmental Sector like that. Yesterday, he had hurriedly taken out the new product that he had shoved in his locker.

"Does it suit me?"

"……That's a difficult question."

Relaxing her lips a little, Monica smiled.

"I'm used to seeing you in black so I thought it was a different person for a second."

"My usual clothes are also in my luggage. I'm used to wearing them……honestly, it's to the point that I'd also like to wear them in the Governmental Sector."

The mateki of Yuugenshu gave off a dark purple brilliance.

It was easy to determine whether a Yuugenshu's mateki had come in contact with the white formal wear. In other words, if he received mateki while in this formal wear, there was no way he could fool them by saying he hadn't.

……It'd be bad if I was bathed in mateki and came out fine.

……It's really difficult. The closer I get to Ymy, the more I'll have to wear this white formal wear.

"*It's finally time to go to the Governmental Sector, isn't it, Monica; the escorting is a big responsibility. Do your best.*"

"Please stop that; I feel like my stomach's going to burst."

The unit captain grimaced in response to machine crystal (Ilis)' words of encouragement.

"……How about you, Sheltis?"

"Everyone's the same; I've been completely anxious since about three days ago."

The mission ——— an escort from the floating continent (Orbie Clar) to the distant Governmental Sector.

The origin of the matter was the Queen's edict. The case on the floating archipelago (Lagoon) that they had gone to together with Leon was the start.

What they had seen underground at a research facility upon the floating archipelago (Lagoon) that wasn't recorded on any maps was ——— that which menaced the floating continent, a Yuugenshu, being cultivated.

"……If we let this assembly go by, there won't be a second chance to investigate that Yuugenshu."

At any rate, it was an experiment where they were cultivating the threat to the populace themselves so they couldn't be forgiven regardless of the reason. Since Tenketsu Palace (Sophia) had decided to send one of the guardians of the floating continent, a Priestess, it was plainly obvious just how seriously they were viewing this assembly.

"Those of us going along as escorts also have a heavy responsibility."

"Don't say it; I actually took stomach medicine before coming. If you say anymore, it feels like it'll develop into gastritis."

Pressing down on the area near her stomach, Monica smiled faintly.

"Come on, Sheltis, rather than that, how are your preparations?"

"Y-yeah……I'm really rushing here."

"I thought so."

Monica sighed with her travel bag slung over her shoulder.

Anyhow, his room was in complete disorder and his bag on the bed was overflowing. It was a situation where him not being ready was obvious at a glance.

"It's already gathering time so I had Kagura and Vaiel wait ahead of us at the sixty-fifth floor."

"I-it'll be fine. Just five more minutes!"

"It'd be good if that's all it takes……will you make it in time?"

Looking down at his bag, Monica slowly crouched down. Just when he wondered what she was doing, she began packing things into his bag———

"Ah, ……sorry, getting you to help."

"It'd be bad if you panicked and forgot something. It takes several hours to get to the floating archipelago in the Governmental Sector, so we can't turn back partway, you know?"

Lagoon

While still in a crouched over position, Monica lifted her face and smiled.

Collecting the crumpled luggage, his bag was packed with experienced movements.

"Are you used to this?"

"Packing luggage is a fundamental action for units, after all."

"*So she says, Sheltis.*"

"……"

After he froze for a short moment.

"……Sorry, Monica, I should do the packing by myself at least. It's fundamental, after all."

"Eh, ahh, no! I-I didn't say it with that kind of intention in mind! Th-this is……I answered because I was asked or well……u-umm……"

"*It's fine, Monica. It looks like his spirit's been roused, so leave him alone.*"

"……I'll do my best."

Sheltis began packing once again with all his heart and soul.

.

Part 2

Tenketsu Sophia Palace, Floor 287.

There were only fours rooms arranged on this floor that lay two thousand metres above the surface. All of them were the private rooms of the Priestesses that protected the floating Orbie Clar continent's barrier.

In one of those Priestess' room.

"Ahh, this is bad, I might not make it, might not make it……I might not make it in time!?"

A girl in pure white vestments yelled out while holding a luggage bag with both hands.

Ymy Ele Soufflenictole ——— with off-gold hair and jade green eyes, her countenance had a lovely charm to it .

At seventeen years old, she was one of only five Priestesses in the world.

"Aauuu……there's no time!"

"Come ooon, Ymy? Don't yell out like that and panic. A Priestess must always keep herself under control no matter when, okay——?"

With a teacup in one hand steaming slightly, Meimel was standing there looking elegant by herself.

Her senior Priestess who was rank two out of the five Priestesses. Her long, slender and well-proportioned body and her beautiful mature looks created a splendid harmony with her dress-style vestments.

“Honestly, what a rushed child. It would’ve fine if you ’d done your preparations yesterday.”

Meimel sighed.

“……Who was the one that popped in when I was preparing and made a big fuss all night long?”

“That’s becauuuse, the cute Ymy is going away to the Governmental Sector. It’s a farewell party, a farewell party, I say. Oh my, this cookie is delicious.”

“Are you listening to me!?”

“Come now, that’s why I’m telling you to calm down.”

Mu——. Even though Ymy glared at Meimel, she didn ’t move.

While remaining sitting on the seat, she stretched out her long legs and repositioned herself so her knees were touching. Her outer appearance made her seem like a mature woman of refinement, but her interior was a tease , so she was trouble.

"Umm, I'm sure it was five nights and six days…… with the assembly taking up four of those days? It's sad that we won't be able to meet for almost a week. …… Ahh, it's saddening to think of this as a parting with Ymy ."

The senior Priestess wiped her eyes with a handkerchief.

"Could you not say things that sound so profound!?"

"Don't tell me……within the food served at the Governmental Sector……"

"Poison? Don't tell me there's poison?"

"The food served at the Governmental Sector is too delicious……and an image of Ymy eating too much resulting in stomach pains ends with her being transported to the hospital while crying comes to mind."

"What are those terrible circumstances!?"

"Eh? But that's how it's always been when I left the tower?"

"……No, that's far enough."

……Let's just ignore Meimel and prepare instead.

Looking at the time, it was already nine on the dot. Her guard partner would come to meet her at a quarter past nine and they'd go to the airport within the tower together; such was the plan.

And so.

"……Ymy, is this fine?"

The black-haired Priestess who had been working by herself in silence turned around.

Syun-rei ——— a slender girl of small build whose face still contained childish properties. In contrast with her reserved manner of speech and atmosphere, she was talented and had become a Priestess at the youngest age in history.

"……I'm finished folding the clothes."

Folded clothes laid stacked in rows upon the sofa Syun-rei pointed at. Changes of vestments and personal-use casual clothes as well as nightclothes were present.

"Wah, Syun-rei, thank you. You really saved me! Totally different from a certain someone who's only been a bother!"

"Oh my, I'm sorry about that. Even I'm thinking over various things."

Meimel shrugged in what seemed like a purposeful action. Or so she thought, but Meimel then reached down to pick up the paper bag at her feet.

"Fuufuufu, Ymy. Have a look at this; I've also prepared a proper farewell gift."

Rustle. She was in the middle of pulling something out of the paper bag.

"Eh. R-really? There's……no need to make such a fuss. "

"No, no, this is for the cute Ymy. Look, this is it!"

She took out a one-piece nightgown.

"Now, take this and go. It's a special order made to fit your figure!"

"Waaa, what a splendidly pink negligee! The chest area is open and it's completely bare past the thighs, and to add onto that, it's completely see-through, which makes it really mature!"

With a glance at the surprising lack of cloth on that thing, Ymy cheered without thinking.

"Right? For a Priestess to wear such a thing would be heart-pounding!"

"Yes! Heart-pound……wait, don't joke arouuuuuuund !"

She threw the luggage bag she was carrying at her senior Priestess with all her might.

"Ouch! Jeez, what is it?"

"That's my line!"

"Was it not to your liking?"

"Before talking about my likes, what is that……that indecent design!"

"There's no need to worry on that point——. With your voluptuous body, it will definitely suit you. I guarantee it."

"Whether it suits me or not isn't the point……"

Saying so, Ymy suddenly clammed up at that point.

After she contemplated while staring up at space for a little while.

"That's right. Meimel went to the trouble of preparing it, so I'll take it with me."

"Waaa! Ymy has finally joined the fellowship of adults !"

Eyes sparkling, Meimel set it aside with a cheer.

"……Is that fine?"

"I'm just bringing it; I'll wear my regular nightclothes over there so it's fine."

Ymy closed one eye in response to Syun-rei's whisper. Rather than pointlessly making a fuss here and wasting energy, it was simpler to store away one's weapon like this.

"Ah, that's right. Hey, hey, Ymy, about that negligee just now〜"

And maybe she knew that, but Meimel put her hand on Ymy's shoulder.

"Eh. Ah, yes. What is it?"

"That negligee just now's fabric is thin, but it's made with synthetic fibers so it's strong. Something like a small knife won't pass through it."

"……Eh?"

"Fireproof, waterproof, heat-resistant, cold-resistant, wind-resistant, UV-resistant, and I also applied a shinryoku seal, so it will also more or less defend against a Yuugenshu's mateki. It's fine if you think of it as a

scaled-down version of a Priestess' vestments. It'll help you be more at ease than your regular nightclothes, right ?"

"……This is?"

Lowering her gaze silently, Ymy opened her bag and peeked inside.

Shoved into the bag forcibly ——— the negligee that wasn't folded and had become crumpled.

"I said it was a special order. I hurried to put in an order the day it was decided you'd go to the Governmental Sector and it just barely made it in time this morning."

The senior Priestess informed her with a happy smile on her face, like a child who was reporting a test with full marks to his or her parents.

"……For my sake."

"Of course, it's for the sake of my cute junior."

Even though Meimel had said it was a shinryoku seal, this wasn't a simple job.

The spell to apply shinryoku to an object was extremely time-consuming. Even for Meimel, she still had her training as a Priestess so she must have stayed up late into the night when everyone else was asleep for many days.

"……"

Gazing fixedly at the negligee upon her hand———

"……That's unfair. If you say such things, there's no way I can reject it."

"Yes, that's the cute thing I love about you."

"That's really playing dirty."

In front of Meimel who was looking on while nodding, she neatly folded the now-crumpled negligee and put it back in her bag.

"Ymy, try to keep this at heart? We have no idea if the place you're about to go is dangerous or not."

"……The Governmental Sector?"

The unmanned research facility discovered at at the floating archipelago Lagoon under the Governmental Sector's jurisdiction, as well as the cultivation facility underneath that. At any rate, the goal involved was uncanny, a complete mystery. It was unknown what she would see heading off to the dominion of the Governmental Sector who were the apparent ringleader.

……No.

……Bringing that goal to light is the Priestess' job this time.

She was going to a land she hadn't seen before with the general resolve to face danger.

"No, **not that**. **A separate danger from the Governmental Sector**."

"Eh?"

"……At any rate, just think about keeping yourself safe, okay? A Priestess must realize the importance of her life more than anyone else."

Filled with dignity and pride, Meimel's voice resounded deeply.

———Ring———

From the door came the bell indicating the presence of a visitor.

"Oh my, it seems they've come just now to meet you. Ishtar ——— the Cadres Guard who's famous even within the tower."

"Is she that famous?"

Luckily or unluckily, she still hadn't experienced a mission involving Elite Guards.

"She's famous——. My partner invites her to train a lot." [2]

"……Leon said it as well. That's she's strong."

Meimel and Syun-rei spoke and nodded unanimously.

The Cadres Guard was, so to speak, the Guard closest to the Sennenshi. If her skill was enough to mention the

current Sennenshi, just how extraordinary was her strength?

"……I wonder what kind of person she is."

"You'll know as soon as you open that door."

Meimel gracefully smiled as usual.

"I'll be going."

Putting strength into her shoulders, she hefted up the bag which made a weighted sound.

……Monica-senpai will be going along.

……Also……Sheltis will protect me.

Her senior from her days as an apprentice Priestess and her childhood friend whom she'd been separated from for so long. She could be with those two once again. They had been separated for a few years……and she could meet them once again.

The heavy pressure from heading to an unknown land was eased a little just from thinking about that.

"Have a safe trip. I'll be looking forward to souvenirs."

"……Take care."

Waving at her two fellow Priestesses with a smile, Ymy passed through the room's door.

Part 3

Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace, Floor 65, the airport within the tower.

It was the terminal for the airship controlled by the Mechanical Bureau and the floor which encompassed the greatest amount of space.

There were ten-odd platforms solely for when the tower's Guards or Bureau Chief-rank staff went on a mission and the runway extended far into the distance.

With one step onto the floor———

"Come to think of it, Captain Leon was with us that time."

Monica who was walking beside him suddenly stopped and turned to him.

Lagoon
"……The floating archipelago case?"

"Last night, I was thinking that this was our first mission and couldn't sleep……so I just stared up at the ceiling the entire time and happened to remember it……"

Monica stared fixedly at the black floor underneath her .

The black tiles covering the floor were cushioning for withstanding the airship's arrival and departure. She stared without blinking at those tiles which would reflect one's face should they look hard enough.

"Monica, are you okay?"

"Y-yeah, it's nothing! I was just being a little sentimental!"

Monica hurriedly averted her face away.

"……Being unable to sleep last night……was also partially because of Ymy-sama."

With a frail smile, the former apprentice Priestess shook her head.

Monica had been Ymy's senpai three years ago. That Ymy had become one of only five Priestesses in the world.

"Is it hard to talk to her?"

"……It's pathetic but I don't know how I should talk to her."

Monica chewed her lip with a pained expression. Because of their reversed positions, Ymy and Monica were troubled as to how to connect with each other.

"I think she wants to talk with you like before."

"……Yeah."

No, Monica definitely knows that already.

She knows but the other party is a Priestess, a protector of the world. Treating Ymy as a kouhai probably makes her feel something akin to guilt.

"*It's impossible to do it immediately, but wouldn't it be best if the approach came from this side?*"

"……How should I call out to her?"

"Isn't it fine if you say, I'm the unit's captain, Monica?"

Sheltis carried on machine crystal (Ilis)' advice without changing anything.

"I've been granted the pleasure of traveling together with you and hope we get along ——— that much is fine. It should be hard for her to call out to you as well considering her position."

"……I see, that's right."

"*Don't forget to smile as you do it～, a smile is important.*"

"……Yeah."

Nodding, Monica finally started moving.

And.

"You've finally come; you're seven minutes late."

"You're slow."

The small-statured girl wore a machine helmet low over her eyes and standing beside her was a blond young man of large build with short hair. Each of the two clothed in their white formal wear turned to face the arrivals.

"Good morning, Kagura, and Vaiel was also on time?"

"That's because she came and woke me up one hour before."

The blond young man stifled a sleepy yawn ——— Vaiel turned a displeased look at the girl beside him.

"If I hadn't, you would be late. Well, let's put that aside."

Replying in an aloof manner, Kagura exchanged looks with Monica.

"Monica, look over there. It's the important '*customer*' of ours."

"Customer?"

"Come now, the four on the other end."

An airship lay where Kagura indicated.

Directly beneath its silvery wings, a group of four men and women could be seen receiving an explanation from a pilot.

One was an elderly man accompanied by a lean woman with a calm air about her who stood to his side. The other two were one step away, frequently taking memos with nervous expressions.

“The General Affairs Bureau chief and his head secretary, and those two are clerk and private secretary. Monica, you went to greet them the night before last, right?”

“Yeah, since only meeting them on the day of would be too sudden.”

Monica noted each of them one by one with her gaze.

“The furthest one, the person who’s putting on years is the General Affairs Bureau chief. The woman in a suit to his side is his head secretary and it looks like the negotiations with the Governmental Sector will be

centered around her. The two a little bit further away are clerks; they said it was their first time going to the Governmental sector so they're nervous."

"I see, so then they also know about us?"

"Yeah. I also did a basic introduction of our unit. They're gentle-mannered people so they politely listened to what I had to say."

Following Monica's line of sight, Sheltis also stared sidelong at the four further in.

……Those people.

They were the four people directly in charge of the negotiations with the Governmental Sector and the targets for escort of their unit.

"Well then, let's get moving."

"Yes, that's right, get the introductions over with already. The General Affairs Bureau chief is also waiting."

The one who assented to Monica wasn't one of the four within the unit———

"Ohhh, it's I'sa?"

Sheltis tilted his head at the unexpected appearance of the girl.

"What's up, have some business here at the airport?"

"There's nothing going on; isn't it expected that as her little sister, I would be here to see onee-sama off on her expedition?"

She combed her lustrously shining hair with her hand. She had a small build but with mature grey eyes, and the badge representative of a Regular Guard was attached to the shoulder of her completely wrinkle-free formal wear.

Regular Guard I'sa Is Ismael. [3]

She was the Regular Guard who had been the examiner for this time's mission and is the little sister of the Cadres Guard, Ishtar, who would be traveling with them.

"That onee-sama of yours……is Ishtar-san still not here?"

"It looks like she'll be coming with the Priestess-sama. Consider it an honor, to have a mission together with onee-sama and the Priestess-sama. It's enough that I also want to go along."

In response to Kagura who was looking around, I'sa answered with folded arms.

"……Onee-sama, huh."

"What? Did you say something, dual sword user?"

"Ah, n-nothing! Just talking to myself."

Turning away his face, he somehow averted I'sa's question.

……Ishtar.

……Our last match was how many years ago.

It's been quite some time and I've grown a fair bit…… so I'd like to think my identity won't be discovered at a glance. As long as she doesn't have any proof, it should be the same as with Kagura and remain at the '*suspicious*' level.

……But if I'm discovered and my real identity is outed right there.

……This time, I won't be able to stay at Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace.

A person who had fallen to the Garden of Corrupted (Eden) Song and was supposed to be dead was alive. Even though that was a serious affair in itself, if it was known that the Garden of Corrupted (Eden) Song's mateki lay within him, it would cause a panic throughout the floating (Orbie Clar) continent.

"_____"

He stole a glance at the girl with her sakura-colored hair tied in a bundle.

……Monica would also find out.

Having admired him three years ago, she had gone so far as to throw away her position as an apprentice Priestess and become a Guard. If she came to know everything……Monica would probably be angry. Or else .

"Hey, dual blade user, are you listening?"

His flank was being poked by I'sa.

"Eh? Ahh, yeah. The introductions, right?"

"If you know, then get on it with it. The Cadet Guards are the side **being allowed to escort** so approaching the escort target from your side is the logical move."

I'sa sighed, looking worn out.

"Well, that's fine. That being the case, I'll introduce you. Come along."

"Eh?"

Saying so, she headed forward as the vanguard and walked towards the four at the other side.

"Oh, it's you."

Matching up with when the old man turned to her, I'sa clutched both ends of her skirt and curtsied.

"A pleasure, General Affairs Bureau chief, Maxwell. I was really in your care the other day."

"Ohh, it really is I'sa-kun. I kept relying on you throughout the escort last week. Your partner as well, even though he was convalescing, I had him push himself."

"Absolutely nothing of the sort; it is our duty."

Alongside the old man who was smiling, I'sa was also nodding with an adorable smile.

Now then ——— I'sa turned back towards them with a small mutter.

"Let me introduce you: this is the captain of the unit entrusted with the escort, Monica, and three of its members. From the right, it's Vaiel, Kagura and one other."

"Just my introduction, so mean!? No……I'd like to say something."

Then.

Just as he was about to object, Monica and Kagura each placed a hand on his shoulders.

Both of them nodded their heads……eh, does that mean to give up?

"Yes, yes, I've had the pleasure of a previous meeting with Monica-kun. To be this considerate even down to the finer details of escorting, it gives one relief."

"They are my subordinates, so there are no oversights in their training."

The Bureau chief nodded in satisfaction and I'sa had a business smile on.

"Hooh, truly, the subordinates commanded by I' sa-kun are of a different caliber."

"Of course; we can't be causing trouble for the General Affairs Bureau chief."

Hah hah ha, laughed the two.

"……Since when did I become her subordinate?"

"Leave it. There's no medicine for idiocy."

In accordance with Monica's sigh, Vaiel spat out with his usual abusive language, but that didn't seem to reach the two who were having a pleasant chat either.

"Now then, it's exactly nine thirty. The Priestess-sama should also be here soon."

Kagura confirmed the time displayed on her machine pearl (Machina). Receiving that, machine crystal (Ilis) who had been silent until now blinked with vigor and,

"*That's right, it should be soon……ah, she's come! Ymy has come!*"

A faint tension ran throughout all those there.

The General Affairs Bureau chief and the four clerks straightened up simultaneously. Monica turned around with a complex expression and Vaiel, being poked by Kagura, also fixed his posture.

"Good morning, Ymy-sama, we have been awaiting your arrival."

Representing they who were there, I'sa grasped the ends of her skirt and curtsied.

"I shall carry your luggage."

"Ah……y-you don't need to. It's fine!……umm, yeah, I'll deal with it somehow!"

Pressing down on her off-gold hair that had become disheveled from running with one hand, the girl held her bag with the other.

Her vestments had a base of white with azure accents. It was specially prepared for just one person within the tower ——— for those living on the floating Orbie Clar continent, just that would be enough to identify who she was.

"Umm……good morning, everyone, I'll be counting on your for this journey!"

Ymy lowered her head in a bow.

She looked wordlessly at the people around her.

He knew that smile that she turned to him for an instant. It wasn't a smile as a Priestess but one made as his childhood friend.

———Good morning———

Sheltis also nodded wordlessly at that and next, he pushed on the unit captain that seemed lost even now with a small voice.

"Come now, Monica."

"Y……yeah, I know……"

Monica cleared her throat once and took a step out front.

Even while showing signs of embarrassment, she still did it with a dignified and composed smile that that suited her.

"Good morning, Ymy-sama. I'm the captain of the unit that has the pleasure of travelling together with you for this mission, Monica, and here are three members of the unit. I hope we get along."

"Ah……y-yes!"

Ymy's expression brightened up.

Senpai finally talked to me —— it was a smile that conveyed her happiness from the bottom of her heart.

"By the way, Ymy-sama,"

Amidst that, I'sa asked while looking about.

"My sister……I mean, where is the Cadres Guard ?"

"U-um. We were supposed to come together, but the one who came was a subordinate of Ishtar-san. I was informed that she'd come to the airport ahead of me."

It seemed that Ymy also didn't know.

"Oi, oi, oi, the essential Regular Guard-sama is late?"

"If she said she was going on ahead, then that shouldn 't be the case."

"Then what's up?"

"Please don't ask me. We can also rule out her being lost in the airport."

Directly to the side of Vaiel who was sighing, Kagura snapped her fingers.

"It can't be helped. Machine (Machina) pearl —— begin search."

Machina

In an instant, the machine pearl that had been floating in front of her split into over a hundred parts.

Machina

The small machine pearl disassembled into puzzle piece-like shapes in midair. Each of those pieces was equipped with a high-power camera.

"First of all, let's search within the airport."

Answering Kagura's instructions, the pieces of the

Machine

machine pearl flew off in all directions. Meanwhile, I'sa also took a good look at the surroundings and tilted her head.

"……That's strange, I wonder where onee-sama went."

"You mean she's not skipping out?"

"Be careful in opening your mouth, Cadet Guard; this is onee-sama we're talking about so I'm sure she has a noble reason for——"

Just before Vaiel and I'sa were about to have a stare-down.

"Ah, there's a response that resembles her. A humanoid heat signature."

Kagura said while staring at the machine helmet's screen.

"From this reaction, she's to our……oh, that's strange."

Doubtful, her lips turned into the へ character.

"The position is directly above?"

"Ah."

With that one sentence, Sheltis put his hands together in realization. [4]

If Ishtar's unexpected actions haven't changed from before, then if I imagine what's coming based on the words "directly above", she is……no way.

"Say. I think it'd be best if everybody moved away from this spot, it might be dangerous."

"Mm? What's that, what's this about directly above——"

At around the same time Vaiel looked up with a sour face, the happy cheer of a female voice came from directly above.

.

"Iiiiiyaahooooooooo!"

.

Whoooooosh —— the sound of something descending at high speeds and cutting through the air.

Then.

"Aahn? What's thi……vuee!?"

Smush. With aim that was true, the heel of the woman that came from the ceiling crushed Vaiel underneath itself.

"……Hey, Monica, Vaiel can't move while he's being crushed."

"……Don't look at me for that."

While all those there including Ymy, and of course, Sheltis and Monica, were frozen.

"Jya—n, sorry to keep you waaaiting!"

The woman with a spear that was taller than her strapped to her back winked adorably at the same time as a bow.

Pure white pants and tight formal wear. She was a tall woman with black belts made with hide wrapped around her shoulder, elbow, knee and thigh on top of her formal wear.

Contrary to a mature face, her countenance was so cheery it was almost young. Her long hair was a blindingly brilliant golden color like I'sa's and the blueness of her eyes was fairly strong.

"Cadres Guard Ishtar, by the Queen's imperial command, has hastened to joooin! Yippee!"

"……Y……you are……my escort-san?"

"That's riight. It's nice to meet you, Priestess-sama, and I'm looking forward to working with you from now

o—n! Hrm? Everyone's really quiet, did something happeeen?"

She looked around at her surroundings that had fallen silent and tilted her head.

"Daamn yooouuu, what are you doing outta nowhere, you damn woman!"

"Wawahh, what happened!?"

Being glared at by Vaiel who stood up with a look of rage, she hurriedly jumped off him.

"Damn woman just suddenly steps on my head outta nowhere."

"Ahaha, did it feel good?……wait, don't just wordlessly ball your fist! It was just a joke. I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

Just barely holding down his fist that was about to fly, Vaiel turned to the younger sister's direction with a look of anger.

"……Oi, little sister, what's with your older sister. The inside of her head's already a field of flowers."

"Ahh, jeez! Onee-sama, why are you lowering your dignity on your own like this!?"

I'sa yelled while clutching her head.

"Onee-sama!"

"Oh my, I'sa-chan. Go—od, go—od, you're so great for managing to come to the airport by yourself without getting lost. Your onee-chan is touched."

She petted the head of her sister who was a head shorter than her.

"Mumuu, you've let your bangs grow out quite a bit, I'sa-chan. You haven't cut it lately? Ah, a split end. That's no good; you're a girl so you have to take proper care of yourself."

"O……onee-sama, look around you, around! That's embarrassing!"

"Is that so? I don't mi—nd. I'sa-chan's hair is soft like a cat's—"

"Please mind it! D-disregarding me……this will affect onee-sama's reputation!"

In response to the older sister who suddenly started combing her little sister's hair, the little I'sa sister's face turned red and she raised her voice.

"P-putting that aside! Onee-sama is the Cadres Guard and you're escorting a Priestess-sama this time, so conduct yourself as a model for these Cadet Guards!"

"Ahaha, I was scolded by I'sa-chan."

"Onee-sama!"

"Yes, yes, it's fine, I'sa-chan. Your onee-chan will do her best."

"Th……that's right. Onee-sama is my ambition after all! You're strong to the point that nobody can beat you when you're serious so please act with that in mind!"

I'sa shouted with blood rushing to her cheeks.

That was……her gaze while staring at her sister that was also her superior was……an unbelievably adorable and modest change from her usual domineering attitude.

"——Now then, we've caused a commotion, everyone."

I'sa cleared her throat.

"As you can see, onee-sama has a slight side to her but I assure you that her ability as an escort is the best in the tower. Aside from that……please don't mind it."

"Ahaha, I'sa-chan introduced me in my place. Thanks, I'sa-chan, onee-chan's bad at things like that."

In the midst of the confusion, she once again reached her hand out to stroke her little sister's head——

"……Onee-sama."

"……Go—t it."

With a glare from I'sa, that hand froze its motion.

Even though looking at their height and appearance, Ishtar was by far the more mature, the mood was such

that just looking at their words and actions would make one question who was the older sister.

"……Then because I was glared at by my cute little sister, we'll have a serious conversation about wo—rk."

Ishtar turned back to them with her shoulders sagging in disappointment.

"This time's escort will have everyone going to the Governmental Sector over a time period of six days starting today. Until we return safely to Tenketsu Palace ——— is fine, right?"

Sophia

"……Umu. We're counting on you."

The General Affairs Bureau Chief nodded with a subdued voice that sounded undecided.

"O—kay. But Ishtar is to escort the Priestess-sama here , so the Bureau Chief's group's escort will be these Cadet Guards. Right? Monica-san?"

"Eh? Ah……y-yes."

Her eyes opened in surprise, Monica quickly assented. It wasn't because the conversation had suddenly turned to her but most likely because she knew her name.

"You know my name?"

"Ehehe, Ishtar's been a Guard for a lo—ng time. You're the person who quit being an apprentice Priestess and became a Cadet Guard, right? Well? Am I amazing?"

"I-I'm honored……I have also always heard of the renowned Cadres Guard Ishtar. I have the pleasure of going on a real mission with you, so I ask for your instruction in anything that happens."

"Yeah, yeah, Ishtar also likes people with proper manners. Let's get along～"

Monica winked with a sidelong glance —— that was the signal for everyone to begin their individual introductions.

"I am Kagura; I look forward to working with you."

"……Vaiel."

"Arara, looks like quite the displeased person—. Did something haaappen?"

Ishtar peeked at Vaiel who was keeping a scowl on his face.

"Hey, hey, did something haaappen?"

"You fell outta the sky and kicked in my head!"

"Ah—……ahaha, so—rry. But see, the first part is always crucial no matter what, so I was wondering how to get everybody's attention."

"Getting everyone's attention in a bad way."

"And so when I was wondering about who to fall on, you looked the most sturdy."

"You're saying you chose me as the target to fall on to begin with! This damn woman, I'll smash your front teeth next time ——— h-hey you, whose side are you… …mugyu."

His mouth that was about to say something was covered up by Monica and Kagura, and sadly, Vaiel fell silent.

"……My apologies, Cadres Guard Ishtar. My unit member was rude."

"Nah, it's fi—ne, it's fi—ne. I don't usually get those kinds of words directed at me so it's kinda fresh and fun. "

Rather, the Cadres Guard's eyes were shining with enjoyment.

"Hey, I'sa-chan, is that '*interesting guy*' you mentioned before this person?"

"Th-that's wrong! The one I talked about was……that one……"

The one I'sa peeked over at and looked at with upturned eyes and a red face was.

……

……Me?

They noticed.

Following I'sa line of sight, Ymy and Monica and everybody present turned in his direction with a

meaningful look in their eyes. Seeing that, Ishtar also turned this way.

"Ah, the one I'sa-chan was talking about is over here? Let's see――"

Without the rising and falling that signified breathing nor a blink, only those two eyes stared in his direction as if eating into him.

"……"

"Umm, onee-sama?"

She remained silent even though I'sa spoke with doubt .

Then.

"……**I get it**."

A low, suppressed laugh spilled out from those lips.

That was truly a very slight murmur ――― at the same time, with a faint smile that only Sheltis who was directly in front of Ishtar could barely make out.

"Onee-sa——"

"Are, areree?"

With a complete change, Ishtar's smile became large enough that anybody could see it.

.

"**I've seen you somewhere before, haven't I?**"

.

"Eh?"

I'sa and Monica looked over at the same time.

"Hey, hey, have you and I met somewhere?"

"……"

"I think we've met somewhere before, but Ishtar's an idiot so she can't remember. How about you? Do you know me?"

Gradually, Ishtar closed in with a very drawn out pace . Opposite those joyous words, his two eyes were widened an uncanny amount.

……Ishtar.

……I can't tell, which one is it?

With her drawing closer, Sheltis reflexively gulped.

……Are you saying that whilst having completely remembered me?

……Or are you provoking me like this because you lack assurance and are seeking some response?

"Hey, I won't know if you stay silent, you know? Hey? Or is it that **there's some reason that you have to stay quiet?**"

"……No."

The time spent unnaturally silent —— Sheltis shook his head with timing just barely safe.

"I believe this is our first meeting. I only entered Tenketsu Palace two months ago."

Sophia

……It's fine; she shouldn't be able to confirm it based only on outer appearance.

Ishtar should remember me when I was thirteen or fourteen years old and I'm seventeen now. My height has also grown to match hers, and my voice and looks have also changed a little. Even if she relies on her memories, it should stay at the same "Doesn't he resemble a dual swords user I saw a long time ago?" level as Monica.

"You just entered the tower?"

"Yes."

"Is that so, then it might be Ishtar's misunderstanding."

"……Eh?"

She's just giving up that easily? Without even pursuing his thoughtless question, the Cadres Guard turned her back on him as if to say she'd already lost interest.

"Okay, o—kay, I've kept you waiting, Ymy-sama! It's time so let's get going to the Governmental Sector—. Do you get airsiiick?" [5]

"Y-yes……probably."

"That's greaaat. Then let's go. Ah, I'll carry your bag for you—. Special service!"

Snatching Ymy's heavy-looking bag that she was holding, she held it lightly with only her left hand. With the metallic spear wrapped in cloth held in her right hand, her face was totally calm.

"Well then, well then, I'sa-chan, I'll entrust you with taking caring of things while I'm gone for a bit—. Onee-chan's worried that you'll be lonely alone and won't be able to sleep though."

"Pl-please don't treat me like a child! Wh……who can't sleep alone at night?"

"Nah, it's onee-chan who can't."

"Onee-sama!?"

"Ahaha, see ya—"

Just like that, she pushed Ymy from behind and the two walked towards the airship.

"Co—me ooon. The General Affairs Bureau Chief-san's group and their escorts should also come."

"……How annoying."

While putting his dissatisfaction into words, Vaiel went first, then next, Kagura and the General Affairs Bureau Chief's group followed suit and started walking.

"*Sheltis, us too.*"

"……Yeah."

Staring at each of the backs heading towards the airship, Sheltis once again walked.

Part 4

Gigantic clouds passed by as if flowing.

On the other side of the pressure-resistant glass, a scene of fluffy clouds spread out in his lower vision.

Since he became unable to see the figure of the two thousand metre-tall Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace, it had already been one hour.

"……Ohh. It's amazing, Ilis, we passed the floating archipelago (Lagoon) in an instant."

Droplets of water clung to the glass.

Watching that out of the corner of his eye, Sheltis spoke to machine crystal (Ilis) who hung at his chest.

"*We're moving at the speed of sound, so we're advancing at roughly four hundred metres a second.*"

"……Even if you say per second, it feels surreal."

"*The distance from the floating continent (Orbie Clar) to the Governmental Sector's floating archipelago (Lagoon) is just under roughly two thousand kilometres. Amazing, isn't it—, that we would arrive in about two hours. Figuratively speaking, doesn't it feel less like 'byu〜n!' and more like '———hyunn'?*"

"……No, you don't have to force the sound comparisons."

Tap. He heard the sound of someone's footfall.

"Ah, see, Sheltis is here."

"This is the far end; what are you sitting here for?"

The girl wearing the machine helmet low over her eyes was in front with the girl whose sakura-coloredh hair was tied into one behind her.

"You don't have to sit here at the far end; it's all reserved so why don't you sit more towards the center?"

"……Nah, well, it's just such an impressive airship that I was kinda nervous."

The midsection of the airship —— with Monica pointing back at where she came from, Sheltis shook his head slightly more than necessary.

The airship specifically for the use of the Priestesses.

Even though it was an airship of Tenketsu Palace, Sophia there were various kinds ranging from the transportation ships that were for rent to those for the exclusive use of noble visitors, and the ship they were riding was of the largest of the passenger ships. The performance of the

vehicle was a given and the interior furnishings were also of a luxurious design that would make one recall a room from a very high-class hotel. It was the first time he 'd seen an airship with a chandelier shining in it.

"We're already here so what's the problem with looking around?"

Sitting in the chair opposite his, Monica wore a wry smile.

"But look, it seems like the seating locations have already been plainly laid out. The ship's foremost seat is for the Priestess, the midsection is for the General Affairs Bureau Chief and his entourage while we're at the far end."

"……It might do some good if you were to learn a little from Vaiel's strong-willed attitude."

The one who told him that in an aloof manner and sat in the seat next to him was Kagura.

"Ah, come to think of it, what about Vaiel?"

"He's been fast asleep since thirty minutes ago, and what's more, he's in the seat directly behind the Priestess-sama's."

"……You're kiddiiing."

Rather than saying he has no fear, it's more like not being afraid of anything even on a mission like this is a kind of skill in itself.

"Kagura and I tried to rouse him but Cadres Guard Ishtar went 'This person's interesting〜' and seemed quite pleased."

"She exploded with laughter, didn't she."

Monica and Kagura nodded in agreement with their shoulders drooped.

"……It's because you two don't know Ishtar's true character."

"Eh?"

"Ah, no, just a little something. Rather, I was just talking to myself."

He had intended to have it as a monologue but it seemed that Kagura had heard it with her excellent hearing.

"However, I wonder what we should do? Is that Cadres Guard that amazing of a person?"

"That person is……let's see, well, I only heard the rumors when I was an apprentice Priestess but I never actually saw her fight in person."

"Fumu. But her little sister, I'sa-san, holds such adoration for her――"

Kagura clicked her tongue and folded her arms at the argument presented. Her sight that was on the machine helmet's eyeshield turned in his direction.

"Do you know, Sheltis?"

"No, I said I'd only met that person for the first time."

"**Didn't you say that you'd heard it from the Sennenshi, Captain Leon?**"

"……"

Kagura replied nonchalantly.

……It's fine if you only say what you heard from Leon , huh.

Mixing in the unspoken signal by Kagura, Sheltis' inner self had a wry smile on.

"Is that so?"

"Just a little. ……Umm, let's see. This is as much as I heard."

Monica asked with a serious expression and he kept his calm as he replied.

"She was carrying a spear so I think you know already but she's a spear user. I think it was an old style of martial arts. And that she'd advanced to the highest point of mastery in that art?"

"'Pinnacle of the Exorcising Gillshuvesher Lance', isn't it." [6]

Kagura's machine Machina pearl gave off a faint radiance.

"Her data is also more or less within machine (Machina) pearl's memory. Within Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace's registry, her name was updated, it seems. It's 'Gillshuvesher' on the surface but there's appended history to the name."

"Ah……that, that. Well, she stood out in strength when she was a Regular Guard so she was investigated by the Priestesses and Sennenshi of that time at her unauthorized match."

"That much?"

It was a given that Monica would lean forward. It was unthinkable that Priestesses and Sennenshi would appear at a Regular Guard's unofficial, not to mention official, match.

"Yeah. To begin with, her spear skills aren't lacking. She struck down three bullets from a machine gun's high-speed fire with a spear and cut how many dozens of leaves that were falling into human shapes before they reached the ground. There are many stories like that."

"That is……exaggerated, right?"

"No."

He denied Monica's mutter that she made with a half-dumbfounded face by shaking his head sideways.

"I think she can do those and even more. That's why she is the Cadres Guard."

"……What an absurd individual. If so"

Tap.

Monica reflexively swallowed what she was about to say at the sound of footsteps from the rear seats.

"U……umm, is it fine……if I interrupt?"

A circular tray and tea set with cups to match the amount of people.

The one holding that preciously was a girl in pure white vestments.

"Priestess-sama……?"

"*Oh my, Ymy, welcome. Come now, at your leisure.*"

Kagura had her mouth hanging half-open and machine Ilis crystal was the same as always.

"R-really? Then I'll pour tea immediately. I brought a variety with me."

Setting down the tray on the central table, Ymy proceeded to line up a pot of hot water and numerous glass containers of tea leaves.

"Kagura-san, do you have a type of black tea that you prefer?"

"Heh?"

Kagura with her mouth half-open stiffened up.

"Umm, could I have you choose the tea you like?"

"We……well then……one without a strong scent."

"Yes, then I'll use this blend over here. Sheltis will have lemon grass with a spoonful of honey instead of sugar."

Ymy who was making the preparations with experienced movements turned around with an unopened jar of jam in her hands.

"Say, Monica-senpai, you like the marmalade with the peel left in, right?"

"……"

"Ah, jeez, senpai. I'll make the decision if you don't answer, you know? Senpai's been fond of marmalade tea since before, I'll decide on——"

"Wa-waaaaiiiit!"

Monica who had been patiently keeping her mouth shut and shaking on the side exploded.

"Eh? What's wrong, senpai?"

"I-it's not what's wrong!"

She pointed at Ymy who was blinking in surprise with the jam container in her hand.

“Wh, wh-wh, what are you doing……what would you be doing here!” [7]

“We’re on the same airship?”

“N-not that! Where is Cadres Guard Ishtar!?”

“She’s still looking at Vaiel-san’s sleeping face and laughing while holding her stomach.”

“……”

“Monica-senpai,”

Ymy closed in with an exceptionally serious gaze.

“Please, I’d like you to say the truth. Senpai, do you hate me?”

“Wha……th-that……”

“But senpai, you’re always avoiding me——”

“You’re wrong!”

Ymy's words were blown away by her ex-senpai's shout.

"……I as well……truly……however……our positions are different now."

Monica tightened her fist.

As if to draw blood, she continued while biting her lip.

"Ymy is now……a Priestess, a protector of the floating continent. I am……a subordinate. A Cadet Guard like me talking in a such a friendly manner with a Priestess……is not permitted."

Orbie Clar

"But"

Ymy's face that had drooped slightly rose up again.

"Monica-senpai is my most important benefactor. Who will not permit me to speak with that benefactor?"

"……That is"

Monica was speechless with her head still downcast.

A strained atmosphere permeated that area and silence stood between those two like a wall——

"I think it's fine though."

"……Sheltis?"

The two girls that were standing still languorously raised their faces at the same time.

"Monica also said she'd like to get along, right."

"B-but……a mere Cadet Guard acquainting with a Priestess-sama is a brazen act"

"That Priestess-sama is saying it's fine, so there's no problem."

Kagura said as she held the machine (Machina) pearl.

"I also agree with Sheltis. The side that approached first was the Priestess-sama, you know? That is unmistakably the popularity that you have cultivated until now. It's fine if you bask in it."

"……"

Ymy advanced step by step towards the unit captain who was listening keenly.

"Senpai……I'm truly happy to be able to be together with senpai like this again……that's why I ask you, let's get along like long ago."

"……Really"

"Eh?"

Before Ymy replied with a question, Monica's hand reached out to Ymy's bangs.

"……Really, what a troublesome kouhai."

She strongly rubbed her kouhai's hair.

"You became a Priestess and I thought you'd become outstanding, so don't trouble me so much."

Fuu —— she sighed deeply while lowering her shoulders.

"Th-then, senpai!"

"Marmalade is fine but I've been having milk tea lately ."

"Ah……y-yes! I can also prepare milk tea quickly!"

Monica smiled wryly as Ymy made her preparations in great haste.

He looked on at those two from behind.

"We should change seats. They probably have things they'd like to discuss alone."

"I would say."

Sheltis and Kagura looked at each other and exchanged nods.

"*They've made up. But really, peoples' emotions are complicated and a pain.*"

"That just now was a little special."

He smiled wryly in response to machine Ilis crystal whose tone was meek.

"But with this, we've also gained the strongest personal connection called the Priestess-sama. As reliable as it is."

"……I can't guarantee the reliability though."

"Fumu. By the way, Sheltis, may I ask one thing?"

Sitting in a seat further away, Kagura pointed at Monica and Ymy behind her.

"What about them again?"

"That time when the Priestess-sama was preparing our black tea. Why did Ymy-sama know your preference in black tea?"

"……"

"How about it?"

"……She definitely heard it from Leon."

"*……I also have a feeling it may or may not be that.*"

At any rate, he brought up his old friend's name here and Sheltis averted his face quite openly.

Chapter 2: The Governmental Sector

Part 1

The runway that stretched on endlessly.

Sliding into the runway that was gleaming silver in the sunlight, the airship gradually slowed down.

The airport that had been nothing but a speck slowly increased in detail and the control tower directing the airship became visible to even the naked eye———

A tremor.

Because of the shake from landing and the sudden braking, his body that was secured by the seatbelt jittered slightly.

"*Oh—. It looks like we've arrived safely.*"

"It's about time."

Confirming that the airship had come to a complete stop, Sheltis stood up from his seat.

"Okay, now the—n, Ymy-sama, this way—; make sure to follow me, okay?"

"Y-yes!"

First was Ishtar leading Ymy.

Behind them were the General Affairs Bureau Chief, his female private secretary and the two clerks.

"*Come on, Sheltis, your protégés went on ahead.*"

"I'm in charge of the one furthest to the back so it's fine. It's easier to work if I'm a little further away."

His protégés were the old man, the General Affairs Bureau Chief, the female private secretary and the two clerks.

Standing ahead of the four walking together was Monica, Kagura and Vaiel were flanking the left and right and Sheltis was behind all of them.

"*Oh, it's quieter than I thought it would be.*"

Advancing down the pedway connected to the airship led them to the departures gate on the second floor of the airport. [8]

The information counter and observation seat and everything else in the giant hall were completely empty. The garbage collector and guidance staff that should be working in the hall were nowhere to be seen.

It was a given that machine Ilis crystal would question it; there were far too little people around.

"It looks like they reserved the airport."

"*So it's that an airport with nobody in it provides complete assurance of safety. It's kind of lonely though.*"

They proceeded down the path from the departures gate towards the airport's main hall. It was a strange feeling that they wouldn't meet anyone regardless of how much they went ahead.

"Okay, o—kay, everyone, stop. This is the arranged meeting place—"

With that, Ishtar who was ahead came to a stop with a smile.

"A meeting place?"

"That's right, Ymy-sama, it seems the person acting as a secretary for the Governmental Sector will guide us. … …Oh, maybe it's that person? That's them, that's them. O —i!"

Look around at the surroundings, Ishtar suddenly raised a hand.

A woman of small build in a white suit slowly made her way over. She had slightly drooping eyes with black-rimmed glasses. Her light green hair was cut short.

"Everyone, I'm terribly sorry for having made you wait. I am the Governmental Sector, sector 1, administration department, general affairs division —— diplomatic secretary, Yuragi. Let us have a favorable relationship by all means."

The woman lowered her head in an exaggerated action .

"Especially towards the Priestess-sama, I would like to extend my gratitude as a representative of the Governmental Sector to you for coming all this way from the distant Tenketsu Palace. As you can see, I am the only one that has come to greet you but please forgive it in the name of complete security."

Sophia

The Governmental Sector's guide lines were said in a practiced tone.

"Heh—, so you're known as Yuragi-san. I'm Ishtar, let's get along—"

"Yes, let us be amiable." [9]

Yuragi replied to Ishtar with a business smile.

"Well then, Ymy-sama, I will first guide you to the hotel you will be using this time. The luggage you entrusted to us at the airport has also been carried to Ymy-sama's room."

"I-is that so? Thank you very much."

"That is also our job."

The secretary pushed on the bridge of her black-rimmed glasses with a smile.

"Today is the day we should commemorate the first time a Priestess has stepped foot upon these grounds…… or so I'd like to say, but we of the Governmental Sector do not know how we should react to this situation."

"……Is that so?"

"We also had thoughts of a grand welcome but there was also the chance we wouldn't make it in time. Today we have prepared the public hotel on the highest floor of the airport but even that was only reserved yesterday."

"A hotel reservation!?"

Ymy gulped without thinking in response to the secretary's words.

"I……I've never received such treatment even at Tenketsu Palace[Sophia]."

Sophia

"There are many specialized guards at Tenketsu Palace but I don't believe there is a necessity to bring such excess defenses here. Ishtar-sama's prowess has also reached the Governmental Sector."

"Heeh—. But being complimented here makes it scary afterwaaards. Are you planning something?"

"Who knows? That's not something I of the general affairs division would be privy to."

She brushed off Ishtar's doubts with a smile.

"……Somehow, she gives off a very Governmental Sector feel."

"*It's impossible to know her character?*"

"Yeah, well, it can't be helped if there's doubt."

The island with no map. The underground room at the ingeniously hidden facility. And the water tank breeding a Yuugenshu. Whether that would be cleared up would be following the meeting tomorrow but they couldn't let their guard down at other times either.

"Sheltis."

Monica who was staying at the General Affairs Bureau Chief's side approached without a sound. In a suppressed voice low enough that it would be erased by footsteps and wouldn't be heard at all by anyone.

"I'll tell you one thing about this female secretary."

"Yeah?"

"The first sector……that is to say, she's a spy for Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace that's in the central division of the Governmental Sector. She's part of an important function of the Governmental Sector with the aim of gathering information."

"Eh……ehh!?"

"Shh, you're too loud. It's secret information, so be careful."

"I get it but……is that for real?"

Tenketsu Palace (Sophia) was dispatching spies to the Governmental Sector. Sheltis had also heard those rumors when he was an Elite Guard but he didn't think they actually existed.

What's more, that secretary was one?

Her manner of speaking was good, as well as her manners, and there was no doubt she was a person from the Governmental Sector.

"Since when have you known, Monica?"

"Ymy-sama told me aboard the airship. It's information nobody other than Cadres Guard Ishtar and the General Affairs Bureau Chief should know so be careful."

"……What an amazing person."

Getting into the central division of was already of excessive difficulty.

One wouldn't be employed by the Governmental Sector's central division unless they were outstanding and being ordinary wouldn't cut it when spying and sending information to Tenketsu Palace.[Sophia]

"Now then, Ymy-sama, if we go down the elevator over there, we will soon arrive at the hotel on the highest floor of the airport."

Whether knowing or unknowing.

The bespectacled secretary at the head of their group wore an unmoving smile.

.

Part 2

Public integrated hotel, [Asterhythm]. [10]

The first class lodgings monitored by the Governmental Sector. It was a hotel containing various facilities such an exercise gym in the vast ceremonies hall , a pool as a matter of course and a movie theater and drama stage.

In the lobby. Ymy, who had been led by Yuragi, had just parted with the vigorous handshakes and voices of adoration that greeted her from the managers, chefs, the receptionists at the counter, the garbage collectors and the girls that were part-timing. It didn't stop at the hall either as workers were lined up all the way to the next path.

"……Oh, my, my?"

Stopping at the gate, Ymy surveyed the gathering of people before her.

……This many people are greeting me?

……But Yuragi-san just said that they barely reserved the hotel.

"All of the hotel staff here have been awaiting Ymy-sama's arrival. For the purpose of safety, the airport was unstaffed but, of course, we can't have a hotel without its managers or chefs and other staff."

"Ah, I see. That's right!"

"Yes. My apologies, did it surprise you?"

Yuragi was smiling as usual.

"Ymy-sama and Ishtar-sama are this way and the others shall be escorted by the respective person in charge of them."

"O—kay, well then, Ymy-sama, let's go this way!"

"Eh……y-yeah."

Being pushed on by Ishtar, Ymy followed after the back of Yuragi who had went ahead.

.

Part 3

Room number 700, [Asterhythm].

The instant she opened the room door that was decorated with the hotel's name, a gentle breeze with the sweet and sour scent of citrus fruits wafted over her hair.

"……It's strange."

Standing in the center of the living room large enough to play tag in, Ymy once again looked over the room she had been gestured to.

……Even though she was in the room.

……There was a gentle breeze blowing and she could hear the chirps of the island. It was just like――

"Ama—zing! It's like being in the middle of a huge plain!"

Ishtar who tossed aside the luggage she was holding had her eyes sparkling.

"Say, say, what's going on, Yuragi-chan!?"

"The gentle breeze is being mimicked through cutting-edge air conditioning settings. The sound of the island is genuine and comes from a parabolic reflector device set up on the floating archipelago. Also, the ceiling can be made to open and close, becoming a glass dome when open. I believe it is the best room to appreciate a full view of the starry sky."

Lagoon

The secretary pointed at the ceiling with a shining chandelier.

"Oh—! That's why it's on the top floor of the airport?"

"Yes. That's the selling point of this hotel. Does it meet your fancy as well, Ymy-sama?"

"……It's amazing."

The Priestesses' private rooms at Tenketsu Palace were also made with comfort in mind but she felt that this room was also wonderful from the bottom of her heart.

Sophia

……When it becomes night, the sky becomes really beautiful.

"Oh my, oh my, Ymy-sama? Your face is so—mehow grinning broadly—?"

"Heh?……Th-that's not true!"

"Ahaha, it was a joke, a joke. Now then, Yuragi-chan, it's about time for a serious chat, isn't it?"

Holding the spear wrapped in cloth under her arm, Ishtar walked to the wall.

"……A serious chat?"

"That's right. I should tell you soon. First of all, Ymy-sama, concerning my introduction earlier."

Yuragi pulled out a white card from the breast pocket of her suit. It was a business card that used ink which would only react to reveal color under special lighting.

"Governmental Sector, first sector, administration department, general affairs division as well as Tenketsu Palace (Sophia) [Independent] special duties agency, Yuragi A Sohma. For six days starting today, I will be providing support on Ymy-sama's special mission."

"……"

"Is there something?"

"N-no!……It's the first time I've spoken with someone from the special duties agency so I was a little surprised."

Ymy waved her hands in a panic at Yuragi's extremely deep bow.

The special duties agency was not affiliated with any bureau of Tenketsu Palace. Starting with the Governmental Sector, she'd heard that they gathered information in various places. Meimel had told her that her senior Priestesses knew but it was her first time meeting them.

Sophia

"If I were to say, it's far more nerve-wracking for a person to talk to the Priestess-sama like this."

"……Is that so?"

"Yes, but I'm glad. If I compare Ymy-sama with the other Priestesses, it somehow……feels like you're not above us but a lot closer."

Yuragi smiled with her hand to her lips.

"Well then, let's move on to the main topic——"

"Ah……wa-wait! Umm……well……having that conversation here"

Sitting down on the living room sofa, Ymy looked around her.

This was already the floating archipelago (Lagoon) that the Governmental Sector monitored. What's more, this hotel was directly linked to the Governmental Sector. It was the same for Yuragi herself; wouldn't having a conversation related to Tenketsu Palace (Sophia) here be bad?

"Umm, well, see……someone could be listening in or something."

"I checked this morning for the presence of listening devices in this room. Additionally, I brought along jamming equipment, so please be at ease. ……Well, that took a while so I ended up being late in greeting you today."

Yuragi stood in the center of the living room with her hands spread.

"From today onwards for six days, think of this room as the Tenketsu Palace (our) side's command center. Bear in mind that the business meetings for the assembly that starts tomorrow as well as conversations about secrets

regarding the tower should not be conducted outside of this room. Of course, secrets about the Governmental Sector as well."

"……Yes."

Faced with that sharp gaze behind those glasses, she nodded greatly.

"Thank you very much. So I say but I believe there won't be many opportunities to have those discussions so Ymy-sama shouldn't worry about it either."

Yuragi who'd sat in a chair softened her tone with a smile.

"……Is that so?"

"There are all kinds of expectations mixed into this assembly but the bargains on that end are for the General Affairs Bureau Chief to handle. Ymy-sama's job is not negotiations but to flaunt your status as a guardian of the floating continent. That will become a heavy pressure on the Governmental Sector more than anything else."

Orbie Clar

"Fl-flaunt……?"

She held back the impulse to draw away.

"Ymy-sama∽?"

The feeling of her cheek being poked with a finger. Ishtar who was supposed to have moved to the wall had sat beside her at some point in time.

"Ymy-sama, you're bad at being 'Priestess-like', aren't you∽?"

"……Eh……ah, umm, a little."

While casting her gaze down at the carpet underfoot, she replied normally. A novice Priestess like her conducted training from morning to night every day. The dazzling image she was given was out of the question.

"First of all, for the good will meeting tonight, this hotel's hall has been reserved for a dinner party. You will also meet the Governmental Sector's important officers there for the first time."

"……Being absent from my stomach hurting because of nervousness……isn't allowed, is it?"

"It's not."

She was refused with a smile.

"Say— say—, Yuragi-chan? That good will meeting is still hours away, isn't it. What will Ymy-sama do until then? What are the plans—?"

"Touring."

The secretary pulled out an electronic notebook in response to Ishtar's interjection.

"I shall guide you through the central part of the island. It is the best way to learn about the Governmental Sector's rule."

"……An inspection?"

"There is also that meaning to it, but it's fine if you just go with the intention to sightsee. I will guide you through a place with many carts and food stalls, so I believe it will be enjoyable."

"Ah……I see! Meimel said to go because it would be fun."

"Meimel-sama has come to the Governmental Sector secretly. During that time as well, she was mostly under my care."

Meimel did?……I didn't know.

I'd heard that this was the first time a Priestess was publicly visiting the Governmental Sector though.

"Then shall we head out?"

"Ah, please wait a little. Ymy-sama?"

While looking at the electronic notebook, Yuragi pointed at her travel bag.

"Before that, may I have you change your clothes?"

.

Part 4

Room number 301, [Lily]. [11]

It was a room that was separated from the Priestess' room 700 by two corridors and a large hall. Different

from the [Asterhythm] that was meant for guests, regular patrons could lodge here.

"Fumu, fumu, it looks like the layout for the 300 and 400 rooms is roughly the same. Our room as well as the General Affairs Bureau Chief's room are of the same structure. This is convenient since we know our protégé's room structure and can react to even the one in ten thousand occurrences."

Gazing at the hotel's pamphlet, Kagura folded her arms in satisfaction.

"Was this Monica's idea?"

"I asked them to to accommodate it. I said I'd like for them to be in a room aligned with ours but it's great that that was granted……Sheltis and Vaiel, come over here as well."

Monica spread a rough sketch of the hotel atop the table. Using red and blue ink pens, eight room sections were cleanly divided by color.

"First, this 300 room is the General Affairs Bureau Chief's room and this neighboring one to the left is our room 301. Following that is the private secretary's room, Sheltis' room, the clerks' room and after that――"

"Rather the important part is that the escort and protégé's rooms are mutually aligned, right?"

Vaiel was glaring at the rough sketch with a look like it was a pain.

"If there's even a slight distrust on the side of either the escort or the protégé, there won't be any contact between the two……well, I don't think there's anything."

"Being careless is forbidden. By the way, Kagura, I'd like to confirm once again."

Monica slowly took something out from her pocket.

"Yes. There were no listening devices. It's fine to speak normally."

"Understood."

The thing that Monica was holding slipped from her hand.

Clack —— a transparent shard hit the top of the table. It looked like a crystal but the shape of its cracks suggested a different object.

"*Reinforced glass, I see. If I were to name something like it that's familiar, it would be the Tenketsu*[Sophia] *Palace's windows which are made of the same glass. It has a high value but it is also used in experimental apparatuses like water tanks or flasks .*"

Water tanks.

Sheltis looked at Monica's face reflexively upon hearing the term that machine[Ilis] crystal used.

"Monica, is this"

"It's a fragment of the water tank we found on that island; an answer finally came from Tenketsu[Sophia] Palace's analysis team last week."

The group of three consisting of himself, Leon and Monica had gone to the floating archipelago. It was a fragment from the time they had found the Yuugenshu breeding water tank.

Lagoon

"And this is from the case where Sheltis and Kagura were attacked by the caster Maha."

Monica pulled out another glass crystal. This was a fragment collected from the Yuugenshu water tank that [Golden] Maha had been protecting.

The two shards fell onto the center of the table. It was reflective almost like a mirror.

"According to the analysis team, the composition of these two is completely the same."

"……I see."

Sheltis exhaled while slightly biting together his molars.

The Yuugenshu water tank that was suspected to belong to the Governmental Sector and the Yuugenshu water tank that [Golden] Maha was protecting were the

same. In the case that the Governmental Sector had set up the Yuugenshu water tank, there was also the possibility that Maha was an assassin of the Governmental Sector.

"……We should also be prepared to receive an attack on this island."

"It's fine, Kagura, because you figured out Maha's techniques that time."

Sheltis gave a slight nod to the girl with a machine helmet who looked up at him with unease.

"We'll get through this time too. I'll also do my best. Okay?"

"Th-that's right!……I'll also support you. With that, you understand, right, Vaiel; do the escort properly!"

"Haah? Why are you turning to me?"

"You are the most worrisome. Ah, hey, don't look the other way and pay attention here!"

"……Ow, owowow! Damn you, don't just twist people 's necks by force!"

Kagura and Vaiel started to quarrel.

Looking on with an astonished face, Monica sighed.

"……Jeez, there's no tension at all. Even though we were in the middle of a discussion."

She combed her forelocks with her hand. While doing that, she let her vision wander in space as though in thought……in the end, the one who spoke first was machine Ilis crystal.

"*Right, right. Speaking of which, how did it go? The relationship repairing you did with Ymy onboard the airship.*"

"W-wait, wait. We weren't fighting or anything to begin with!?"

She smacked the top of the table in her assertion.

Though with that said, her face from her cheeks to her ears was a brilliant red color.

"A-anyway……we decided that we'd act as before in non-public places."

"Is that so. I'm glad."

Before coming here, he had talked with Ymy in advance. That she should treasure the time with Monica on this mission.

“But a mission is a mission and Ymy understands that as well so we’ll hold back――”

Just as she was about to stand from the chair.

The door that should have been locked opened and someone ran in.

“O～kay. Everyone gather in the lobby, we’re going on a tour with everyone!”

“Come ooon, Monica-san, come quick! We’ll leave you behind if you’re slow?”

Ishtar stood in front of the door and beckoned.

“Yuragi-chan said she’d guide us. There are carts and food stalls and you can eat as much as you want? It’s fine , we can draw out money from Tenketsu Palace’s finances!”
Sophia

"……My……Our unit's first mission is……an all-your-can-eat tour……"

"C-come now. The Elite Guard's saying that, after all."

For the time being, Sheltis comforted the unit captain that had been moved to tears.

.

Part 5

Governmental Sector, central area, Triumphal Arch.

It had been about half an hour since getting on a large transport vehicle when they came to see a large pure white gate shining in the sunlight.

Guessing by sight, the height was four or five metres. The width was well over twice that. Of course, it was a scale that would allow this large transport vehicle and even a large armored vehicle to pass through easily.

"It looks like we've arrived, so everyone please exit the vehicle."

Yuragi descended from the passenger seat at the front and pointed at the large gate.

"The central area is from this gate onwards. If we compare it with the floating continent (Orbie Clar), this area would be synonymous with the Living Districts and at it's center is the agency known as the '*Governmental Sector*'. Around this area is as you know."

"……That's a large gate. It's white and large like Tenketsu Palace (Sophia)."

Ymy looked up at the pure white gate in front and sighed in admiration.

Maybe it was to avoid standing out in a crowd. Her current clothes were a common sky blue blouse with frills and a white mermaid skirt.

"It is known as the Triumphal Arch. At the time the Governmental Sector moved from the floating continent (Orbie Clar) to this floating archipelago (Lagoon), it was a gift conferred by Tenketsu Palace (Sophia) as a proof of friendship. The pure white color is as Ymy-sama stated, it was done in the image of Tenketsu Palace (Sophia)."

"Is that so? S-sorry……I'm bad at history like that."

"It's fine; that is why the explanation has its worth."

Yuragi pulled out something that looked like a tourism pamphlet. When he wondered what she was doing, she rolled up that pamphlet —— and pointed towards the path that led on past the Triumphal Arch.

"Let's begin touring the city immediately. Or so I'd like to say, but we only have to walk straight down this road."

It was a public road that was wide enough to have a footrace on.

The surface was a glossy black. The materials used to coat the ground also seemed special and the ground's hardness couldn't be felt when they walked on it. It was a feeling like walking atop a cushion.

"Such strange materials. Yuragi-san, what does this pavement use?"

"It's asphalt with chemical fibres woven in. I've heard that the Governmental Sector's development division is gathering data on it as an experimental material. It

absorbs the impacts from walking and if a child falls, it'll only end with a light injury."

"……That's quite intriguing. I'll take a little data."

Kagura squatted down and poked at the pavement's surface.

"Kagura-san, it's fine if you're staring at the ground but pay attention to the front properly as well."

Maybe that action was strange. In a rare moment, Yuragi smiled broadly in a natural fashion unlike her usual business smile.

"In front?"

"Yes, to both sides of this road."

The large public road stretched out into the distance so far that it seemed like a mirage. The countless carts and food stalls that lined both sides of that street were the highlight of the scene.

Of course, there were carts and food stalls selling food and drinks that weren't seen on the floating continent, as well as flower shops, astrology shops, clothing and

Orbie Clar

accessory shops, and even massage booths. Each of those was decorated with their own unique ornaments, calling out to the tourists that were walking through that public road.

"……Such amazing fervor; you can't see a crowd of booths like this on the floating Orbie Clar continent."

"Yes. The difference between this floating Lagoon archipelago and the floating Orbie Clar continent is in that '*density*'. Ah, you over there, could I get mixed juice for all of us? Include straws."

Turning to the boy vendor, Yuragi flicked out a pure metal coin.

"This island is only an eighth of the size of the floating Orbie Clar continent. Within that small area, the residents, travelers and merchants are gathered so the density naturally became high. ——Yes, thank you. It's fine if you keep the change as pocket money."

The secretary took the paper cup with drink the boy was holding.

"Go ahead, Ymy-sama and everyone else. The moon viewing apple and blue lemon juice……because of the climate, neither of them are cultivated on the floating continent.
Orbie Clar

Let's see, let's see —— the instant Sheltis drank the sample half, the pleasant aroma of fresh sourness and faint sweetness spread within his mouth.

……Ah, this is delicious.

This cool and gentle refreshing feeling is something that other drinks fall just short of.

"This tastes good. It's not too sweet nor too strong."

"……Hmph, it's not bad."

Kagura and Vaiel who had cautiously confirmed the smell had also drank a mouthful and it seemed it had fit their fancy, so they drank a second.

"That's a relief. There are many other delicious cuisines so please enjoy it so long as it doesn't affect tonight's dinner party. ……What I wanted Ymy-sama to know was in fact this."

"This……was it?"

Ymy stopped the hand she had the juice in and asked back blankly.

"This scenery isn't bad, right?"

Yuragi who was walking at the forefront spread her hands in a slight gesture.

The road ahead was overflowing with the fervor of the tourists and vendors and would have anyone's eyes shining. That scene was not different at all from something that could be seen at the floating continent. Orbie Clar

"The Governmental Sector has two sides. The side that acts as a political opponent to Tenketsu Palace and the other is this. The side that acts to regulate and eagerly strives to preserve this lively townscape. Both of them are real and not a ruse." Sophia

"……Truly, it's different from what I imagined."

Ymy who was looking around at the public road nodded with a subdued expression.

"Of course, marking the Governmental Sector as a '*good thing*' is premature. But on the other hand, I think that knowing about this side is important."

"Y-yes. It's become a really good reference!"

"That's great. ……You also drank all the juice; the child from before is also delighted."

Ymy nodded many times. Yuragi took the empty paper cup that she had been holding with a smile and quietly threw it into the collection bin on the side of the public street.

"By the way, about Ymy-sama's escort"

"Ishtar-san, is it. ……H-huh? Come to think of it, she's been quiet since a while ago."

Ymy looked around for the escort that should have been beside her.

"*Ah, over there, Ymy, at that child vendor. She's in the middle of discussing with that kid that sold us juice.*"

In the direction that machine Ilis crystal had talked about —— the figure of the spear user could be seen handing a

coin to the boy Yuragi had bought juice from, receiving juice that was bottled in clear glass in return.

"Okay, onee-chan, two one-litre bottles of the juice from before!"

"Thanks. With this, the souvenir for I'sa-chan is settled , yep. Buying Jin's portion as well and that's two bottles. Perfect! Ah, the dry flowers over there are also really beautiful!? That might also be a good souvenir for I' sa-chan!"

Putting the two glass bottles under her arm, she went further and further away.

"……Somehow it feels like she's really enjoying herself ."

"Yes, but it also feels like that's fine. Ymy-sama is also in disguise so it would be more unnatural for Ishtar-sama to stick right next to her as an escort, right?"

The Priestess sighed and Yuragi had her arms folded with a wry smile.

"Shall we go find a good bargain like Ishtar-sama?"

"Th……that's right."

She tightened her fists and turned towards her senpai, the ex-apprentice Priestess.

"Monica-senpai, let's also go with the intention of not losing!"

"Ehh! W-with me!?"

"Didn't you take me out for shopping together in the past?"

"Th……that's right but……umm."

The unit captain let her gaze wander in embarrassment.

"……Well, it can't be helped. If that's also included in escorting."

The wind blew into the public street. Her sakura-colored hair flowing, Monica took her kouhai's hand and walked on.

"However, don't separate from me. It looks like Ishtar-sama is also doing whatever she wants so I have to protect you."

"Y-yes!"

The two held each other's hands and walked.

They should be close to them but not at too close a distance and keep watch——

"Ah. Hey, hey, Sheltis, are you by any chance jealous? "

"Not at all."

"*Eh—, but the position by Ymy's side has been taken. Really ? Really?*"

……Idiot.

Bearing it with a wry smile, he shook his head sideways.

"The one beside her is Monica, a girl. What's more, she 's Ymy's senpai, and looking at that great relationship makes me also feel happy."

"……*Well, that laid-back attitude is very like you.*"

Machine Ilis crystal' sigh resembled an amazed laugh.

And in a spot a little further away, Vaiel with a tired out face,

"But you know, it's such a pain to walk on and on. How far are we going?"

"A little more. Somebody with good vision should be able to see it soon."

Yuragi prompted in the direction the large public road extended.

Above the horizon that her gaze led to, a towering black shadow stood with a grand sea of clouds as its backdrop.

……That is.

"That is the Governmental Sector. It is the agency that oversees this world's politics including legislation and the administration of justice and it is the place that everybody will be visiting tomorrow."

Yuragi narrowed her eyes behind her glasses.

"I believe this is something you're already aware of but the Governmental Sector was formerly a member of the floating continent (Orbie Clar). About half a century ago, they contested their respective authorities and it ended up in a separation from the floating continent (Orbie Clar)……it has existed since then as the agency focused on legislation and the administration of justice."

"However, by splitting up, they also removed the reason for discord. As a result, it repaired their amiable relationship to the current state. ……It's nostalgic, that was back when I was still a bad kid."

An elderly person that was standing behind the group looked up. Taking that gaze on directly, the woman who was part of the Governmental Sector smiled.

"It is as the General Affairs Bureau Chief stated. The assembly tomorrow is also for the purpose of promoting

deeper friendship. At the very least, that's what I believe personally."

Personally. She emphasized that unnatural part. Basically, that was to say that even if she thought that way, above that —— there were those who didn't think that in the center of the Governmental Sector.

"Umm, Yuragi-san, is it okay if I ask something really fundamental?"

"Yes. It's just that in actuality, my senses as someone working at the administration department tell me that the consul is a figurehead in the end. In actuality, the ones administrating the law are the former old parliamentary members. ……The three administrators are the three oldest parliamentary members; you could say they act the part of elders."

The three administrators and the parliament known as the former old parliament with its members.

Those were the top executives that ran the Governmental Sector.

"The ones that will be in charge of the assembly tomorrow are the former old parliament members but

the administrator elders should also be present at tonight 's dinner party. It will likely be suffocating for Ymy-sama ."

"*Fumu, fumu. Well, putting dinner aside, isn't it fine if we're enjoying right now?*"

Machine Ilis crystal threw in some appropriate response in a nonchalant tone.

At a place away from the group —— two girls were in the middle of walking around the carts.

"Ah, Monica-senpai! I found a rare accessory shop on the other side!"

"Well, wait, Ymy, I'm interested in these fabrics here."

"But, but, it seems like the accessories over here are special products?"

"Even this plant fibre isn't available outside of this island——"

Even though they were pointing at completely opposite directions, neither of their hands would let go of the other.

It was like a scene of two sisters with a great relationship.

"……Their relationship was really good, wasn't it, Monica and the Priestess-sama."

"Both sides are brats, they're brats."

Rather than feeling touched, Kagura and Vaiel were now taken aback.

"*Hey, Sheltis, I'm gonna ask again but you're really not jealous?*"

"……That's why I'm asking, why do you think that?"

Without even bothering to hide his bitter sigh, Sheltis once again looked on over the two from behind.

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Part 6

[Asterhythm].

Returning to her own room, Ymy staggered to and collapsed on the sofa.

"……I-I made it back."

"Good work today. How was the dinner party? I heard that all the head chefs in this hotel made a full course meal with everything from the menu without discretion for this day."

Yuragi was looking over a large amount of documents on the table.

After the noon touring ended, it was finally time for the evening dinner party. A good three hours had passed and she had been keeping watch over the room during that time.

"……I was nervous and couldn't taste anything. It would've been great if I could have had Ishtar-san eat in my place."

"Ishtar ate many things from the carts while walking at noon after all."

The person in question shook her head with a smile.

Her seat was also prepared in the dinner party but she had just sat there smiling from beginning to end and hadn't laid a hand on any food.

"Also, it would've been problematic if something had been mixed into the food at the dinner party. Even if the hotel's cook-san has no such intentions, I have to at least consider the possibility of poison in the food."

"Ehhh!? Say that earlier!"

"Ymy-sama is a guest so you can't very well refuse the food that you're offered, right? Ishtar is an extra so it's fine if she doesn't eat."

"……W-well."

That's true but wouldn't it make somebody suspicious if they're told that twice?

"That's why Ishtar didn't eat. She also considered poison testing by eating ahead of you but that would serve no purpose if the poison was of delayed effect. Rather than having both of you eat and both of you

going down, if Ishtar at least is still fine, then she can look over Ymy-sama. Forcing you to expel the poison and such treatments are her specialty."

"……I understand."

"Right? Though I thought it would be fine nine times out of ten."

She continued on with an indifferent tone.

……I wonder if that was the reason when she was eating while walking at the carts at noon.

Maybe she never had the intention of eating at the dinner party from the start.

"Ishtar-san is quite the outstanding individual."

Yuragi shut her notebook and smiled.

"Ymy-sama has returned so it's about time I also return to the Governmental Sector. I'll be here at nine tomorrow morning to greet you."

"……The assembly starts at ten, right."

Forming a fist with her fingers that seemed like they would start shaking, Ymy let out a deep breath.

The former old parliament would be attending from the Governmental Sector's central division. From Tenketsu Palace would be the General Affairs Bureau Chief and his private secretary. At this place that was specifically for politics and negotiations, she wondered whether she could really fulfill her role.

Sophia

The Governmental Sector-owned '*island with no map*'. The mysterious experiment facility and Yuugenshu breeding water tank that Sheltis' group had discovered there ——— even though they had to cross-examine them about the goal for that.

"It'll be fine if it's Ymy-sama. Well then, I'm off."

Yuragi replied with a calm tone and bowed. She saw off Yuragi who walked out the door with a leisurely pace .

"Ymy-sama, you don't seem like you're going to be able to sleep tonight, huh—? Is your heart racing?"

Ishtar removed the cloth wrapping her spear with a swoosh.

"……I was also told that by Meimel."

"Ahaha, if this was I'sa-chan, then I'd hug her tight and say, '*It'll be fine*—'. I wonder if the Priestess-sama wants to do that."

Beneath the ceiling's lighting, the spear sparkled by reflecting the light. Pearl-colored metal —— it was a strange material that was rarely used for Guards' weapons.

"Umm……Ishtar-san."

"What is iiit? What could the Priestess-sama be interested in—?"

While sitting down in the chair, the Cadres Guard leveled her spear horizontally. There was something about her that had been bothering Ymy since she'd met her.

"Ah, well, you really like your little sister-san."

"I'sa, you meaaan? Yes, she's Ishtar's only family in any case."

"What about your other family?"

"There are none—. Ishtar and I'sa have been alone since a long time ago."

A family of just the two of them with no parents or relatives.

"I-I'm sorry……"

"It's not something Ymy-sama has to apologize for, you know? And look, I'm carrying pictures."

She rustled her breast pocket and pulled out a single picture.

Faded away by a large amount of time —— it was a picture showing the two blonde sisters.

The older sister was around over ten years old with a bright and cheerful air about her. The younger sister was still four or five. Compared with her older sister, she was more feeble and her expression was darker, leaving a timid impression.

"It's a picture from almost ten years ago—, and this little girl is I'sa-chan."

"……Are you possibly carrying that all the time?"

"Of course! I never let it off me!"

She gazed at the crumpled photograph dearly.

"I'sa-chan used to have a weak constitution long ago and would immediately get a fever, you know? On top of that, she was very spoiled and would cry while saying, '*It's lonely when onee-chan isn't here!*' when Ishtar went out to get her medicine."

"……It's somehow a little unexpected."

.

"*My name is I'sa. Pleased to make your acquaintance.*"

.

Ymy's impression of the Regular Guard I'sa was completely the opposite.

A shinryoku practitioner that had become a Regular Guard in their teens and had a promising future. Her manners were good and she was calm with an understanding of the duties of a Guard.

"But she's become really outstanding now so you should also be reassured as her onee-chan, right?"

"Mm— that's……well……I wonder."

That was really unexpected. Just when she thought that a flat-out agreement would come immediately, she went silent with her spear held against her chest.

"Well, that's that. Okay then, once more to fix the mood!"

She once again leveled the spear horizontally while seated on the chair.

She thought she would do something but she just stared into thin air with her spear readied. For Ymy who was unlearned in martial arts, it was an unknown action that couldn't be identified as training.

"U-um. That is"

"This? I'm just maintaining my feel for the spear—; see here. I asked Meimel-sama to add a new shinryoku seal here so the spear's weight changed."

The figure of an azure spiral was carved into the spear's handle.

It was a formal seal that would defend against a Yuugenshu's mateki as well as destroy the crystal at the center of their bodies.

"……Would that change much?"

"Mm— well, **about forty seven hundredths of a gram, I guess**?"

Ymy completely didn't understand the meaning of Ishtar's words for a moment.

……0.47 grams?

A change in weight that didn't even amount to more than half a gram. A weight that wouldn't even amount to a slight amount of dust stuck together. Rather, it would be okay to write it off as a measurement error rather than calling it a change in weight……no, to begin with, is it possible to even notice such an exceedingly small difference?

.

"With great reverence and dignity do I carve my name . That's the path I've chosen, Priestess-sama?"

.

A moment.

Her red lips whispered something……or so she felt.

"Huh? Is so—mething up, Ymy-sama?"

"Eh……ah, umm."

Putting her hand on her chest, she blinked many times and then Ymy looked at Ishtar.

"Y-you said something just now, didn't you? Sorry, saying it that quietly and so fast……"

"Nope—, Ishtar didn't say anything—"

H-huh. She didn't say anything?

That shouldn't……I certainly thought she said something. Also, she seemed like a completely different person for an instant but……that was also a misapprehension?

"Rather than that, Ymy-sama, is this fiiine?"

"Eh?"

"See, didn't you make a promise with Monica-san and Kagura-san that you'd go to the baths together? You said you'd contact them after you returned from the dinner party."

"Ah……ahhhhhhh, I-I forgoooooot!?"

The hotel being reserved also meant that the large bath was reserved.

Without concern for status as a Priestess or Guard, they were going to chat while leisurely warming up with just the women —— that promise as well had flown out of her head due to the relief of having finished the dinner party.

"I-I wonder if it's still fine. I wonder if everybody's waiting for me……"

"If you've got time to worry, run, run!"

"R-riiiight!"

Holding a full change of clothes, Ymy flew out of the room.

"Oh my, oh my, how rushed."

Looking on at the Priestess that had burst out of the room like a bullet, Ishtar softly loosened the edges of her mouth.

"……Now then, the assembly starts tomorrow—. It'll be great if it goes well, I won't say anything. But if not——"

With her pearl-colored spear held out horizontally, she quietly got up from the chair.

"I wonder if there will be a show of force?"

.

Part 7

Hotel room 303, [Aster]. [T/N: The kanji here is 紫 which is literally purple garden. It also refers to a certain plant called aster tataricus: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aster_tataricus.%5D

"Hey, hey, Sheltis—, take me along with you too to the large baths, okay—? Even though Ymy and Monica and Kagura are going, it's lonely if I'm the only girl being left out."

"……"

He closed the pamphlet he was reading.

He stared down at machine crystal (Ilis) who was rolling around on the desk.

"Isn't Ilis the one always saying that she'll break down from being exposed to moisture?"

"It's fine; I won't be in the bathtub but in the sauna."

"But it's a pity. We're on lookout while Monica's not here."

Ishtar was on standby outside the large baths entrance.

During that time, Vaiel was keeping watch in front of the empty [Asterhythm] room and he who was left in the room was taking on the escorting of the General Affairs Bureau Chief's group of four.

"Ah—ah, right about now, Ymy's group is playing around and having fun. 'A-amazing, Monica-senpai, your waist has tightened even more than three years ago. Can I feel it a little?', 'St-stop that, it tickles! Ymy as well, more than before——'. See, it seems fun even just by imagining it."

"……That's hard to comment on."

He couldn't imagine what girls would talk about, especially in the bath.

"Do they really have those kinds of conversations?"

"*Of course, there's no mistaking it. My previous possessor constantly said it. She had confidence to boast herself as humanity's strongest in battle and style and when she entered the baths with her friends, they would compare and tease each other as an everyday activity.*"

"……What is that unlikeable person you described."

Just who ——— when he had voiced that much, he tilted his head at the question that he thought of.

"Your previous body?"

"*Ah, come to think of it, I forgot. There was a girl I supported before you.*"

It was the first he'd heard of this. That machine[Ilis] crystal had a previous possessor before him……no, if he thought about it, there was nothing strange about that. But he had never been told that by machine[Ilis] crystal so now it drew his interest.

"*That person hated speaking about herself with others. 'Don't talk about me.' was how I was forbidden to speak. It was about ten years ago so I guess it's hit the time limit?*"

"Would that happen to have been the Queen? When I received machine[Ilis] crystal at the time I became an Elite Guard, it was from the Queen."

"*No, the Queen was just entrusted with me by my previous possessor. My previous possessor was a different person but well, the Queen knows her. It'll be a long story but would you like to hear it now?*"

"……Mm, then I'll ask later."

Picking up the pamphlet he'd closed once again, he proceeded to read each line intensively. He was also interested in machine Ilis crystal' story but there were things he should memorize before that.

"*Is that the floor map for the Governmental Sector?*"

"Yeah, things like the emergency exit paths or barrier locations or the shelters. After that, I have to get as much of the layout of large rooms and whether there are one or two floors or such into my head."

Of course, he had finished inputting the data into machine Ilis crystal before this. However, in real rushes, there wouldn't be the leniency to ask someone so he'd have to know the location himself or he wouldn't be able to react.

"*How passionate. Is it about the case you talked about at noon?*"

Noon at the large public road.

During the time they were being guided by Yuragi and touring, he had had a bad feeling that just wouldn't go away. It was just like something was lingering over and continuing to observe them ——— a gaze.

It was from a distant location so nobody would know but it wasn't friendly.

……As I thought, there's something here.

As proof of that, Ishtar also showed no signs of slackening her vigilance. It was also like that at noon; while she showed off that she was going around the food stands, she kept a set distance from Ymy.

"*It looks like stuck in the middle of the enemy's camp⁓. There are enemies in every direction?*"

"……I wonder."

.

Part 8

At around the same time.

The stage moves to the open air cafe, ‘Albireo’, in the floating continent’s Living Districts.Orbie Clar

.

At the small bathroom located at the interior of the shop.

“Hachi, hachoo!”

A young girl sneezed with an adorable voice.

“Ah—, did the water get cold? Come on, Yuuto, wash the bubbles off your head and get in quickly.”

“……Yuto feels like someone’s spreading rumors about her.”

With shampoo bubbles left on the tips of her black hair , Yuto rubbed her nose.

Secretly smiling wryly at that adorable appearance, the orange-haired girl —— Eyriey slightly shook her shoulders in the bathtub.

“Mm? Ahh, you sneezed because somebody’s spreading rumors about you? That’s been said since a

long time ago, hasn't it. Why is that, I wonder……well, whatever. Anyway, get in. The water really will get cold. ”

Splash.

She raised her shoulders out of the milky white surface of the water and beckoned with her finger.

"O—kay!"

Hobbling over, Yuto faced the bathtub and jumped in. Normally, it was an action that would cause one to slip but this young girl was sensitive in strange areas.

"Oyo, you still have shampoo bubbles left."

"Awa?"

"Well— that's fine, don't mind it, don't mind it; it's better than catching a cold because the water went cold."

Scooping water from the bathtub with both hands, she poured that on Yuto's head to remove the bubbles.

"……Still though, Sheltis is at the Governmental Sector , huh. How nice; I've never been there either so I'd have liked to go."

"Governmental Sector?" [12]

"Right, right. I'd like to make an airship one day and try going. Me and Yuto and Sheltis, and I also have to invite Shasa-chan……ah— but it's so peaceful."

She scooped up water with both hands and slapped it onto her face to keep herself awake.

……Sheltis just went to the Governmental Sector recently so he won't be back for a while.

……It looks like Shasa-chan is also busy with her job at the tower.

.

"*My name is Shasa Endens Lin Kale.*"

.

The girl with the old-fashioned name she'd come to know at Tenketsu Palace. She had met Ymy and Monica with Sheltis as an intermediary but Shasa was the only one that Eyriey had found and befriended herself.

Sophia

"It'd be great if Yuto could also meet her next time—. Hey, Yuto?……Yuto?"

What's this, no response?

So thinking, she tried looking in front of her chest and what answered her was a sound of sleeping breaths.

Hugging her own chest, the figure of a young girl who'd dozed off was there.

"Aha, it can't be helped since it's already late at night."

Patting her head softly, she looked up absentmindedly at the steam-filled ceiling.

……Come to think of it.

……The place I first met Shasa was also at a bath.

That was about two weeks ago.

The time when machine Ilis crystal entrusted her with its own maintenance.

It was around that time when, at Tenketsu Sophia Palace, the case where a practitioner that named himself as 'Golden' Maha wiped out a unit of Cadet Guards occurred. After that, she'd heard that just Sheltis and Kagura had wrapped up the entire case themselves.

"Ymy and Monica and Kagura are all at the Governmental Sector. If they don't hurry up and come back, I've got nothing to do!"

She sunk her mouth below the water surface and blew bubbles.

Looking at the air bubbles that disappeared upon rising, Eyriey remembered the faces of her friends that were at the Governmental Sector and sighed.

Chapter 3: Relationship Time

Part 1

The Governmental Sector.

It was the single large agency that presided over the largest of the islands in the floating archipelago (Lagoon) which could be lived on by people. It was an organization whose members were chosen by poll and it had the authority to oversee the administration of justice and the legislation.

"……But it's pointlessly large."

With one step into the Governmental Sector's sector, Vaiel turned around with an disgusted expression.

It was a four floor structure with three aboveground and one below.

Its first floor's height off the ground of two hundred ninety metres gave off a feeling of being low compared to Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace, but in return, that **it was wider** by that much was the Governmental Sector's characteristic. Even just in the lobby, the far end was blurry.

"The building's interior is also strange. It's like an ant's nest."

Kagura was looking at the electronic screen posted at the lobby.

What she was displaying was the first floor's floor map but just like a labyrinth, the paths converged and diverged in a complicated manner and then proceeded to converge again. Also, in the middle of a path were rooms of varying sizes randomly placed, making it difficult to even find one's destination.

"……Hey, hey, who's the guy who decided to make this into a maze?"

"It's the Governmental Sector's construction division. To lay out those paths took four years. However, I can't deny it if you call it a maze."

Beside Vaiel who let out a sigh, Yuragi answered with a wry smile.

"With a floor this complicated, the Yuugenshu would also get lost, right? Because of this floor layout, even if the Yuugenshu invade, we can safely evacuate."

"……Yuugenshu also appear on this floating archipelago?"
Lagoon

Ymy turned around with eyes of sadness.

She couldn't make it so she didn't hear that. Having allowed the Yuugenshu's invasion —— for the Priestesses that governed over the barrier, that was a truth equivalent to failure.

"No, it's a suppositional matter. This floating archipelago is separated from the floating continent so it's hard for even a single Yuugenshu to find it."
Lagoon
Orbie Clar

"I-is that so……I'm glad."

Ymy cast her eyes down with an expression that showed she was truly glad from the bottom of her heart.

"Please do not concern yourself. We are also not slacking in countermeasures against the Yuugenshu everyday. ……Rather, that is exactly why we have today's topic of discussion."

Clack.

Yuragi narrowed her eyes to a state like a pin and stopped at the crossroads ahead.

"Ahead of here is the assembly room. Ymy-sama and the General Affairs Bureau Chief-sama who will be participating in the meeting, please head on forward. Ishtar-sama and I will both head to the waiting room on the right and Monica-sama's group, please go to the resting area to the left."

"O—kay, well then, Ymy-sama. The basics of negotiating is to relax—, relax."

Ishtar's sunny voice echoed in the hall.

"Y-yes. I'll do my best!"

She put her hand on her chest and took a deep breath. After that, she gulped and Ymy nodded to herself. Not as his childhood friend, but as a Priestess supporting the floating Orbie Clar continent, she surrounded herself with dignity.

——Do your best.

Making a small agreement, Sheltis stared on at that back.

.

Part 2

"Umm, the Governmental Sector's first floor……this is the second building. That's split narrowly again so this is section 60s resting area?"

"*It's section 61. It's registered as a free room according to the digital map so I think the furnishings have been changed to serve as a resting area for this assembly.*"

"Ah, right, right. It was section 61……but this really is a maze."

Circling the current location with red pen on the map, Sheltis stared fixedly at the map as he approached the sofa.

"*I'll supply the parts you don't remember, okay?*"

"……I only remember the meeting room's location so I 'll rely on you for anything else."

If he went to the crossroad after exiting this room and headed left, it would not be long to the meeting room. If something unnatural were to occur, he would be able to run to Ymy's location in thirty seconds.

"But this room is a little troubling."

Kagura let her body sink into the flexible sofa.

Putting the cup with ice floating in it to her mouth, she pointed at the room's four corners.

"Look, this is a free room but it has soundproofing. We can't hear anything from outside so don't you think it'd be hard to tell if something happens outside? It doesn't look like there's any video surveillance equipment to watch the meeting room's status either. Are we stuck in a spot and relying on the unit captain?"

"……Please don't put pressure on me. It's been a while so I'm nervous."

In a corner of the room, Monica was sitting upon a hard wooden chair as she nodded with a wry smile.

She closed her eyes and put her hands together, bearing with it without moving at all. If one looked at her , even a child would noticethe faint green light hazily shrouding her body.

"Ah— I see. Clairvoyance and telepathy."

Both of them were territories of techniques that afforded super perception.

'Clairvoyance' would burn the situation of a distant location into one's mind and 'telepathy' allowed one to communicate with a distance practitioner. Monica was able to handle these techniques because she had been an apprentice Priestess.

"You're peeking in at the meeting room with clairvoyance and speaking telepathically with the Priestess-sama that's in the meeting?"

"If I could do that, I wouldn't be weary. ……It's protected by the same arrangement as Tenketsu Palace."
Sophia

A reflective barrier.

By erecting a barrier in a special place, it was a technique that obstructed other shinryoku other than that .

In order to protect important secrets from the Big Three through clairvoyance and telepathy, Tenketsu Palace's aboveground floors to its summit were covered with a large-scale barrier that the Priestess Sophia Meimel had applied.

"……It looks like clairvoyance is impossible. I tried sending a message through telepathy from my end as well but it was reflected by the barrier."

Moving only her lips, Monica continued.

"Well then, there was no meaning?"

"No, just a little while ago, Ymy broke through the barrier……you could say it was done with pure force using her shinryoku quantity; that child hasn't fixed the roughness of her techniques."

The unit captain shook her head in reply to Vaiel's mutter.

"In other words, even though I can't reply from my end, I can hear Ymy's reports."

"*That's interesting. Is there any important information?*"

"There's been no progress. '……The conversation is stuck and doesn't seem to be progressing.' is what she said."

"I bet."

Matching up with Monica's sigh, Sheltis stood up from the sofa.

……So the Governmental Sector won't show a fault so easily.

The floating archipelago (Lagoon) that wasn't on the territory map and the Yuugenshu being bred there. There was no way they could simply ask and get an answer.

"……It's probably hard on Ymy who's just staying still though."

The monologue he said with a wry smile quietly dissolved into thin air. Choosing this time when a curtain of silence fell, Sheltis turned his foot towards the door.

"Monica, I'm going to go outside for some air."

"Don't go too far."

"I'll return quickly."

Waving his hand lightly in reply, he set foot into the corridor.

"Oh, see. As I thought, it's cooler here."

He looked up at the giant circular pillar that extended above his height.

……He felt his flushed body's heat dispersing into the cool rock pillar.

"On top of that——"

"*On top of that?*"

"**It's easier to understand this way.**"

His eyes were focused on the crossroad straight ahead as he entrusted himself to the circular pillar behind him. ——No. Beyond the many diverging paths that lay past the crossroad. Deeper within this building.

——It's here.

The gaze he'd felt since entering this building. No, it would be better to call it a sense of discomfort.

It wasn't the presence of a dangerous animal or a Yuugenshu but 'something'.

"It's here. Probably……nope, definitely."

He had experienced a feeling like this very long ago.

That was already close to ten years ago —— a little after Ymy and he had entered Tenketsu Palace, when he had coincidentally passed by a Sennenshi of that time.

Sophia

A pressure that conveyed that they were 'there'. An overbearing presence that prickled the skin almost to a painful point.

It resembled the feeling from that time.

"It doesn't look like it's nearby though."

Somewhere within this large structure, there was somebody that was causing him to feel this.

"Was there some story about the Governmental Sector training a strong battle unit or something?"

"Mm～ I wonder, shall we ask the receptionist onee-san?"

"……Answer me seriously."

Flicking machine Ilis crystal who had answered nonchalantly, Sheltis stood still there for a short while.

.

Part 3

Kachii, kachiri……

The seconds hand on the clock on the digital screen slowly ticked down the time.

……It's been three hours since the meeting started.

……It might be a good time to think of it as the first half of the battle for the first day being over.

The waiting room returned to dead silence. Remembering how tired she was from looking at closely packed notebook memos, Yuragi exhaled.

……I was resolved but having the time pass this slowly is painful.

……How many weeks has it been since I properly slept?

My lack of sleep is horrible to point of whiting out the inside of my mind.

Her intelligence activities as a member of the central division —— from early in the morning to late at night, she would be working as an executive secretary so to leak information to Tenketsu Sophia Palace, there was no other way than to diminish her own sleeping hours.

Above all, a Priestess came this time so for several days she was being worked to death with scheduling and business meetings.

"_____"

She took out a few caffeine pills hidden in her pocket and carelessly threw them into her mouth before gnashing them.

Because she'd taken such a large quantity over a long period of time, their effects had diminished but this was also a kind of mental stabilizer medicine.

……But it's unexpected.

……I thought that she would start talking since we're free right now.

The companion sitting across the table from her. She was sitting there looking down at the ground without moving.

The Elite Guard, Ishtar.

She was the Priestess' escort and she had been in this character that Yuragi didn't know the entire time.

In contrast to her mature appearance was her young speech pattern. If it was just that, she could be

interpreted as a childish adult but her fighting skills were said to be the same as a Sennenshi so it was troubling to judge.

"Umm, Ishtar-san?"

"……"

"……Ishtar-san?"

"Fua? Ahh, yes, yes. Sorry, I was doing a little thinking ."

She scratched her face looking embarrassed.

"Is it about the assembly?"

"Ehehe. Well, putting that aside—, this is perfect. Ishtar also had something to ask."

"Ask away."

"Umm, I have two things to ask."

On the hand that she held up, her index and middle fingers were extended.

.

"One. Does a fighter with strength rivaling the Sennenshi exist in the Governmental Sector?"

"Two. About the floating archipelago (Lagoon) case that's including amongst the meeting's topics, if someone were to forcefully obtain evidence regarding it, where would they need to infiltrate in the Governmental Sector?" [13]

.

"……"

She unconsciously gulped.

"Say, say, how about iiit?"

"……Before that, I'd like to ask one more thing."

She stared upfront at the Elite Guard that was using a light tone to the end.

"Putting aside the first one, what do you mean with the second one?"

"It's as it sounds, you knooow? There's no deep meaning."

Ishtar had a smile on just like a child's.

"So how about it?"

"……Unfortunately, one doesn't exist. Even if I did know, **it's not something I could answer as a member of the Governmental Sector's agency**."

She somewhat lowered her face and shook her head.

——She couldn't answer as a secretary of the Governmental Sector.

——But as a member of Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace's intelligence, there was an answer she could provide.

She didn't know whether there was some kind of surveillance camera somewhere in this room. As an answer in this location, that was the limit to what she could provide. Now was the moment of whether this hidden meaning had been conveyed or not.

"……"

Time passed and a few breaths weren't taken either in this silence. Then.

"……That's right. Then tell me if you change your mind."

"I can't have that either."

Kusuu. For an instant, the Elite Guard cracked a wide smile and Yuragi also returned a business smile.

With that, they both sat wordlessly on their separated seats.

They didn't look at each other and just left their bodies to the passage of time.

——The continuation would be after the meeting.

Ishtar who had caught onto Yuragi's signal made a suggestion and she had assented to it.

"Now then……"

She opened her notebook to confirm the schedule. However, Yuragi's thoughts started to turn to a completely different direction, the 'confidential talk' that Ishtar wanted to have.

——How serious was Ishtar-sama with the question just now?

She felt cold sweat on her cheek.

……Was she seriously thinking about doing it?

A solo invasion into the center of the Governmental Sector, even more, into 'that place' where the most important secrets sleep.

Also breaking through the defense system that awaits there.

……It can't be that what she was thinking just now was that.

……Was she only thinking of that this whole time today?

"Now then, how will this turn out."

She had certainly heard Ishtar whisper that while sitting in the chair.

.

Part 4

Hotel, room 303, [Aster].

In the living room slightly lit up by sunlight, the high-pitched sound of a flute cut through the air without dying out and reverberated around.

"——Hah!"

He reverse gripped the dual swords shining in deep purple.

Standing upright in the center of the carpet, Sheltis drew out the blades.

From the shoulder to the elbow.

From the elbow to the wrist.

From the wrist to the fingertips.

His arm was using the least amount of strength required and his upper body bent like a whip, using the recoil to lash out with the swords. The blades severed the air creating a vacuum in empty space.

Lash out, sweep, thrust, turn……lash out once again.

He repeated the same process. At first, it was slow enough that a butterfly could sit at the tip of the blade and then the speed had risen little by little until the '*dance* ' was sharpened to the point that it was invisible to human eyes———

"*Okay, stop.*"

The blade that was moving came to a complete halt. That was also at the same time as machine Ilis crystal voice or perhaps even an instant sooner.

"……Who is it?"

He could feel a presence outside the room.

From there, a little while was passed —— ring, came the door bell's ringer.

"Sheltis, could I have a moment?"

The girl with the sakura-colored hair's face peeked out from the door.

"Monica? I don't mind but……huh."

Sheathing his dual swords in his belt holders, he stared intently at the side of the girl who was getting closer's face.

"Wh-what is it?"

"I might be asking something weird but, umm, did you already take a bath?"

The assembly with the Governmental Sector had just ended not too long ago. Continuing on from yesterday, today she had also made an appointment to meet Ymy and Kagura at the large baths —— he had heard such a thing.

"You just entered the bath not too long ago. I think it'd be fine if you take your time."

She had returned too fast for having gone to the bath. Looking at her, there were no traces of Monica's hair having been wet and it didn't feel like she'd taken in any heat from the water either.

"Yeah, truthfully, I'm also talking about that matter."

"Mm?"

"The matter about the appointment at the large baths is as you said but no matter how long Kagura and I wait, Ymy wasn't coming so……when I went to her room…… it felt like she was talking with Cadres Guard Ishtar about something. It was hard to call out to her, so I was just on my way back."

The Priestess and her private[partner] escort, the Cadres Guard.

If it was like usual, it'd be obvious to at least talk but what caught his interest was——

"Did it feel serious?"

"Cadres Guard Ishtar was the same as usual. It's just that that child's expression was a little……it felt like she was brooding over something. Also, the secretary, I think she was serious too."

……Ishtar was the same.

……But the secretary was serious and Ymy had a brooding expression?

"*Excuse me. It may seem like I'm rushing the conversation, but why did you come to Sheltis for this?*"

"It's because Cadres Guard Ishtar said something that caught my interest. She stopped Kagura and I when we were heading back and said, 'Ishtar might suddenly command you tomorrow night so be prepared, okay.'"

"……Tomorrow? There shouldn't be anything special tomorrow though."

He hadn't heard anything about a special event tomorrow from Yuragi either. If anything, the second day of the four day assembly was all that came to mind.

———Be prepared, that line also interests me.

"I also tried thinking about it but came up with nothing. I don't think it's a joke either so I came to tell you what she said just like that. I think Kagura should also be telling Vaiel at this point."

"……I see. Yeah, understood."

In front of Monica who had a half-hearted expression, he nodded more largely than necessary.

"I was told to be prepared so I'll be prepared. It'll be fine if there's nothing but I'll also be able to prepare myself in case we get saddled with an impossible-level order."

"Yeah, sorry but please do that. Well then, I'll return to my room."

She turned around and started to head out.

"……"

Without even advancing three steps, she came to a stop.

"What's up?"

"Ah……n-no……well, it's nothing major but…… yesterday when I went to the large baths with Ymy and Kagura……there was something that caught my interest ——"

While rubbing her hands together, she whispered with a cherry red face.

"U-um. From a man's point of view, being a skinny girl like me……does it diminish their appeal?"

"……Heh?"

"N-no! It's about the common opinion! I wanted to know as general common knowledge……for example, Cadres Guard Ishtar or Priestess Meimel-sama are both slim but I think they're both womanly enough……so I wondered how I was as an example for my type, and so you don't take this the wrong way——"

He idly stared at her as she spoke quickly in a rush.

"Yeah, well, I haven't thought about Monica like that? "

"H-haven't thought about me like that……you mean!? "

"That I don't think your appeal is diminished or that you're not womanly enough. That's what I mean. I haven 't really looked at anyone that way though so I don't have confidence in my opinion."

"I-is that so?……Is it fine to consider that your own thoughts rather than common opinion?"

"Yeah. Sorry I couldn't give you much to think about."

"N-no! Rather, I was more interested in that so it's favorable――"

Monica froze over in a posture with her hands balled into fists.

"Favorable?"

"――Ahem."

The unit captain cleared her throat with a strangely transparent serious expression.

"Sorry for disturbing you; we'll be getting up early tomorrow as well so go to sleep early for that. See you."

"Eh……ah, r-right."

She hurriedly opened the door and disappeared into the corridor.

A little while after, from the hallway that was separated by the door, he felt like he heard a monologue like '……Y-yeah, yeah! I'm glad!'

"*Sheltis, that just now was the shout of a maiden's heart. Please pretend that you didn't hear it.*"

"What just now?"

"*Yes, yes, this conversation is over already! Come on now, we're resuming training so grab your swords!*"

"……Y-yeah."

Being admonished by machine Ilis crystal with a harsh tone for some reason, Sheltis once again gripped his swords.

.

Part 5

Room 700, [Asterhythm].

Under the artificial sunlight's shine was a table surrounded by three women. None of them made to speak and each of their expressions was almost like a contrast to the other two.

The Cadres Guard smiled with her head propped up in her hands.

The bespectacled secretary was looking down at the notebook in her hands basically expressionless.

The Priestess in the center of those two —— Ymy was biting her lip and staring at Ishtar.

"……Could I get you to explain it once more from the start?"

"That's fine—, Ishtar went a little too fast earlier as well."

The Elite Guard deepened her smile.

"As Ymy-sama said earlier, there is a clear discrepancy in what each side is saying. First, what Tenketsu Palace Sophia demanded an explanation for was '*We'd like to have an explanation as to what a research facility of unknown purpose*

was doing on an uncharted part of the floating archipelago.', right?"

"……It's as I said earlier."

The Governmental Sector did not deny the existence of the research facility either.

However, their assertion was that it was a research facility for the purpose of testing the soil quality of the floating archipelago. They said that it had been abandoned long ago and fallen out of use. They stated there was no obligation to map an abandoned research facility so it had been removed from the record.

——They kept to the point of not knowing about the Yuugenshu breeding water tank.

"That's right—. And what was the Governmental Sector seeking……umm."

"It was about Tenketsu Palace's emergency landing on that floating archipelago. As well as an explanation for the recent unauthorized landings by a Tenketsu Palace airship here."

Yuragi said as she eyed through the record of the proceedings.

"Ahh, right, right. And well, we've honestly apologized about the unauthorized landing on the island that started this all. But the other half can't be agreed upon. Our airships haven't had an unauthorized landing in several years besides this incident. Right, Ymy-sama?"

"……Yeah."

Even if they had intruded on Governmental Sector airspace with some objective in mind, if it was at a level that would sow discord with the Governmental Sector, then it would definitely be reported to a Priestess.

"That's right. The Priestess-sama doesn't know and Ishtar hasn't heard anything like that as well. I think this is a fabrication. It's just that the Governmental Sector doesn't care if it stays at that."

"The facility that was on the floating archipelago (Lagoon)…… they're able to make it vague?"

"That's right, it would be bad if they keep that topic consistent over the four day period of this assembly."

Ishtar smiled while still leaning on her hands over the table.

"Ymy-sama has absolute authority concerning Yuugenshu as a Priestess. However, unless the talks advance to the crucial Yuugenshu, no matter how much you sit at the meetings, you won't become a threat to the Governmental Sector. That's why at the very least, 'The Governmental Sector created the Yuugenshu breeding water tank.' —— the talks must proceed at least this far or Ymy-sama won't have a chance to make a move."

"I……have the intention of that but"

But it can't be helped, can it. Even if Tenketsu Palace Sophia wants to advance the talks from that direction, the Governmental Sector is obstinately denying it.

"That's right. Then here's the real issue that leads into. Okay? The plan Ishtar's thinking of is as I said before. There's only one aim, in other words,"

.

——An infiltration into the Governmental Sector's central division.

.

"If we receive Yuragi-chan's help, an infiltration is possible. We'll obtain the observation records for the floating archipelago (Lagoon) that has become a problem. The point is that we'll thrust evidence at the Governmental Sector. Irrefutable evidence, that is."

"That's no good!"

She put power into the hands atop her lap.

"That kind of dangerous action……I won't allow it! There's no way you can make it to the deepest part division of the Governmental Sector with that kind of improvised"

"We will proceed."

Yuragi stared at one point on the notebook.

"Putting aside whether I agree with Ishtar's plan or not, I can search for digital information with my authority. However, that data has a limit to how much we can trust it. There isn't a reason for the Governmental Sector to leave correct records so a falsification like ' Concerning the floating archipelago (Lagoon), there is no history

of a Yuugenshu breeding tank experiment' is highly possible."

"In that case……even more so. There will be no reckless invading!"

If the information she had tired herself out for were the truth, it would pay off. But if the information obtained after braving such risks were fake, it would be terrible.

"Now, now, Ymy-sama. Yuragi-chan only said that the digital records were fake, you know—? **What if there were records left about the floating archipelago other than the digital information—**"

Other than the digital information.

Paper……? Or a sound recording?

No, regardless of which, there was a possibility that the contents were fake. It wouldn't be strange if all the documents concerning that floating archipelago (Lagoon) were rewritten.

"As Ishtar-sama said, what we are seeking is eternal information. Absolutely unmodifiable and undestroyable

, an objective and absolute truth……if you're thrusting it at the Governmental Sector, nothing else will work."

"That kind of thing——"

.

"……'*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*'."

.

Yuragi's words were made with an unusually strong tone that shook the air.

"I also haven't seen the actual thing but it is the Governmental Sector's secret treasure. With a gigantic crystal manufactured ages ago, within the time period of hundreds of years, it has recorded every event that happened on the floating Orbie Clar continent and the floating Lagoon archipelago. It seems it's a system application of territory-type shinryoku techniques or something."

"Mikuva's Crimson Eye……you're kidding. Does that really exist?"

A crystal with a shinryoku technique applied.

When Ymy was still an apprentice Priestess, there was a rumor that she heard.

It seemed like there was a treasure known as the '*Crimson Eye*' that the Governmental Sector was hiding which recorded everything that happened on the floating continent (Orbie Clar) and the floating archipelago (Lagoon). It was information that the spy who had infiltrated the Governmental Sector even before Ymy and Sheltis had even knocked on Tenketsu Palace's (Sophia) gate obtained. However, ten years had passed already without her obtaining definite proof.

……I didn't believe it at all at the time.

……But if that really exists.

"It is information I received very recently from the secretary for the former old parliament's members."

"Say, say, Yuragi-chan, Ishtar asked before too but she'll confirm it once more. Can we really trust in that thing that sounds like a lie? Is it a trustworthy source?"

Yuragi wordlessly nodded to Ishtar who was propped on her hands.

"Yes. I don't know if its function is as the rumors
Sophia
conveyed to Tenketsu Palace but that a treasure of that name exists can be more or less confirmed. Other than that, there's nothing else but to conjecture about the truth of the Governmental Sector hiding the '*Crimson Eye*' from
Sophia
Tenketsu Palace."

"Ah! But if you try saying it"

Ymy continued from Yuragi's words as if flowing from them.

——If you think that that exists, then you can also understand the Governmental Sector's anecdote.

"Does Ishtar-san not know? That **the Governmental Sector's technology is three months behind Tenketsu Palace's** is a pretty famous story amongst the Priestesses and apprentice Priestesses."

"Heeh, that might be my first time hearing that—. What do you mean?"

"Umm……this isn't about the Governmental Sector's system being slow but it's an anecdote to the contrary."

No matter how ground-breaking of a discovery Sophia Tenketsu Palace makes in shinryoku research, the Governmental Sector would follow that several months later.

"Like the Priestess' training methods or the report contents of research results for shinryoku……of course, it 's not everything but included in that are even things treated as secrets; the Governmental Sector would end up at the same discovery……and that happens with a frequency that I can't imagine to be a coincidence."

There were also rumors that the shinryoku practitioners in the Governmental Sector were always watching twenty four hours a day. Because of this danger of being seen, truly important experiments and information had a shinryoku barrier erected beforehand.

"Fumu, fumu, if that information were also being gathered via the '*Crimson Eye*', then it would be understandable. Well, Tenketsu Palace Sophia is also like that so it's not strange if the Governmental Sector possesses something like that."

Ishtar was nonchalant to the end.

"By the way, recorded every event means……umm, basically, that if we ask that crystal what I'sa-chan is doing right now, we'll find out?"

"I think so."

"Oh—!? Ishtar's also interested in that. Like whether I' sa-chan is properly eating alone, onee-chan is very, very worried———"

"But if you're not chosen by that crystal, it's no use."

"Eh?"

The Cadres Guard blinked.

"That is"

"'*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' has a condition……to operate it, right?"

Before Yuragi said that, Ymy focused on her.

"……You surprised me. You knew about the '*Crimson Eye*'?"

"Nope. But if it's a system with shinryoku applied, then I would guess there's a limitation."

There are three techniques representative of territory-type shinryoku techniques.

Clairvoyance and far sight as well as telepathy. Each of these had the possibility to capture scenes or sound from a distance.

"For example, in Tenketsu Palace, there is system that uses shinryoku as a key. The tower's top floor and the door to the room in which Priestesses pray for Hyouketsu Kyoukai won't allow anybody except for those with a special shinryoku wavelength to pass. I just thought that that giant crystal would require a similar key."

Sophia

"I see……then it certainly seems like there's hope. That giant crystal might also show Ymy-sama the truth."

Yuragi took off her glasses and sighed with a faint wry smile.

"As Ymy-sama said, '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' will select suitable individuals itself and won't show anything to anyone else. If we were to go from that——"

"The Governmental Sector also hasn't found someone perfectly qualified either, you mean?"

That phrase.

Yuragi swallowed and Ishtar raised one eyebrow.

"Say, say, Ymy-sama, why do you know that much?"

"Umm……if I said it simply, it's because wide area observation with shinryoku is really arduous. No matter how much it uses shinryoku, it's not like everything is solved."

Let's say for example that we're observing the entirety of the floating continent and detected each and every conversation. Just how extraordinary is that —— Ymy didn't have the confidence to succeed in that either. If you wanted one hundred percent accuracy then even amongst the Priestesses, there's probably only Syun-rei.

"For such an amazing crystal, there must also be suitably amazing people or it won't work."

"That's exactly right. The condition for the '*Crimson Eye*' is still unknown……it is said that something about shinryoku is the key but whether it's the quantity of shinryoku or wavelength is unknown. There are incompletely suitable individuals but the Governmental Sector hasn't found a perfectly qualified person yet."

——Qualified person?

What……what is this feeling that seems like dizziness?

Due to the feeling that also resembled nervousness, her heart's throbbing wouldn't settle down.

……Mikuva's Crimson Eye.

……Records all events……an observation system?

……Mikuva……I feel like I've heard that term somewhere else before.

It really was just recently. Is so, then where? From who ? It wasn't someone amongst the Priestesses nor was it

Sheltis and she shouldn't have heard it from one of the tower's clerks. If so———

.

"The beginning is a thousand years ago at the illusionary paradise. Now, Ymy Ele Soufflenictole ——— when you have seen the world as it was before Hyouketsu Kyoukai was erected, what will be your impressions?"

.

……It was that time.

The scene from a thousand years in the past that was shown to her by the woman who identified herself as Tsali.

When I realized it, I was already collapsed in a park I didn't know the location of. When I fought the Yuugenshu, two girls appeared.

Shasa and Ilis, within the conversation of the girls who called each other these names.

.

"*I'm counting on you, [Machine God Mikuva]-san.*"

"*I believe I have introduced myself as Ilis before?*"

.

……That's right, the term Mikuva came up at that time

.

An instant.

"He—y, Ymy-sama, is something wrooong?"

"Fue? U-umm……i-it's nothing. I was just thinking about something."

Having her finger grabbed by Ishtar, Ymy finally returned to herself.

"P-please, Yuragi-san, continue!"

"Yes. Or so I'd like to say, but I've already everything that I should. What's left is Ymy-sama's decision."

If they could access the crystal treasure, '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*', that the Governmental Sector was hiding, the case on the floating archipelago would also become

Lagoon

clear. She'd heard rumors about that since her time as an apprentice Priestess and Yuragi was also asserting that it existed to that extent so maybe it would be fine to believe it does.

……But the risk is too large.

"That's illegal infiltration after all, right."

"Yes. I only have knowledge of the of the '*Crimson Eye*' ……it's said to be in a place known as the Holy Corridor and the defense system is also a secret. If you're caught there, you won't be able to talk your way out of it and you should also be prepared for the relationship between Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace and the Governmental Sector to collapse ."

"One more thing, this is the question I received from Ishtar-sama at noon. 'Does a fighter with strength rivaling the Sennenshi exist in the Governmental Sector?' ——I'll tell you starting from the results, it's at the level of 'There are rumors that there are.' Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace is also has rumors about important things such as whether there's a sixth Priestess or whether the Queen also has a partner of overwhelming strength like the Sennenshi."

"Fu—n, then we can say they're there as rumors?"

"Ishtar-sama……are your a believer of such stories?"

"Rather than believing, Ishtar thinks it's normal for her ."

Quite easily, the Cadres Guard nodded aloofly.

"Eh? Wh-why do you think that?"

"The basis is……mm— it's kinda hard to explain. Well , anyway, she is. This is the truth. Ishtar was thinking it would be a pain if that were at that Holy Corridor place. ……And so at the conclusion of all of that is the thing that Ymy-sama said just now."

Releasing the bridge formed with both her arms, she pointed her lovely index finger at the ceiling.

"Shall we review it one more time? First we have to try coming into contact with the '*Crimson Eye*' that the Governmental Sector is hiding. If that succeeds, then it solves everything. The problem is that in the case it fails, it will be bad for Ishtar and Ymy who are amongst the

leadership of the tower and possibly even Yuragi-chan. Then what should we do? **We just have to have an underling that we can use to shirk responsibility go**."

"……"

Beneath the table, Ymy suppressed her shaking fists desperately.

……That's right, that was it.

……The thing that I can't permit no matter what.

This person had the intentions of '*using*' someone from the Cadet Guards as a throwaway pawn.

"And just as well, there are four Cadet Guards traveling with us this time—. As long as we explain the circumstances without difficulty, couldn't they infiltrate solo? If it succeeds then that's great and if they're caught and it becomes a problem, we can say 'The executives knew nothing and this was our subordinates' independent action' to shirk responsibility."

She bit her lip hard enough to spurt blood.

If not……she would get excited and be unable to keep her calm and would surely lose something dear to her heart. It was because she felt that.

"Would the Priestess-sama order that……?"

She's asking whether I would tell the Guards who protect me at the tower 'Go.' simply because it's convenient for me.

"**If Ymy-sama has the intention of continuing on as a Priestess from now, she should make the order——**"

Ishtar's verdict was cruel.

"What is the reason in this world for why Ymy-sama forms the barrier with pained feelings?"

There was no need to have it said to her.

It was because the Garden of Corrupted (Eden) Song and the Yuugenshu that lived there were a threat to the floating (Orbie Clar) continent.

"But you know, Ymy-sama? Not everyone in this world is strong enough to oppose the Yuugenshu like

Ishtar and Ymy. **Everyone is weak**……if you were to ask Ishtar, I'sa-chan who became a Regular Guard is also too weak. There's no guarantee that child can win against the Yuugenshu. Even more so for the citizens that live in the Living Districts."

Gently, gently. With a voice just like a lullaby.

The expression on her face was once again gentle to a point she had never seen before.

"However there is somebody planning something by breeding a Yuugenshu. That absolutely cannot be allowed. After confirming their objective ——— we crush them. There's no chance but this one, you know?"

With the assembly in motion, Guards had been able to come to the island freely.

Even more so now that the attention was focused on the Priestess, the alertness of the Governmental Sector was rooted to the assembly. If they were going to invade the Governmental Sector's central division, there would be no second time where such conditions lined up.

……I understand that.

……However.

"My, my, don't make that brooding face, Ymy-sama. It 's fine, it's fine, don't think about what happens after failure; **it'll be fine if we just select those with the skill to infiltrate the Governmental Sector**."

The Elite Guard waved her hand in a frivolous manner .

"Well then, Ishtar-sama, you would select the most skilled person from Monica-sama's group……is the normal line of thought, but more concretely who?"

"Nope, I don't know. That's why I think it'd be fine if we choose Monica-san――"

"W-wait!"

Ymy interrupted Yuragi and Ishtar's conversation with a shout. With enough vigor to kick the table in front of her, she stood from her seat.

"Monica-senpa……I don't want to tell Monica-san that ."

"Whyyyy?"

"……Because"

She bit on the edge of her lower lip.

"If I said that to that person……she would decide to say she would go by herself. She's the kind of person who will definitely reject something that invites danger to the unit."

It would be decided that rather than having her comrades do it, she would do it herself. But that was too much. In the one in ten thousand chance she was caught, it was possible she would be detained in the Governmental Sector and unable to return.

"Well, that's true. Ishtar also feels like she's that kind of person. But if it's not her, then who?"

"……That is……"

……Is there no one else except Monica-senpai?

Someone in that unit with more experience than Monica-senpai and moreover a person I can trust. The person I can definitely trust to make this succeed———

"……Wai……t……please."

Frantically holding back her shrill voice, Ymy muttered as if coming unbound.

……There is one.

There is an amazing Cadet Guard in that unit. Amongst the Cadet Guards……no, an amazing Guard that wouldn't lost even to the Sennenshi is there. Even while he was exiled from Tenketsu Palace, the childhood friend that single-handedly ran all the way to the Grand Santuary when Hyouketsu Kyoukai was penetrated by the Great Yuugenshu Invasion——

Sophia

……Sheltis.

……But can I ask something so dangerous of Sheltis?

Can I 'order' my childhood friend as a Priestess?

"……"

Her dizziness, headache and feverishness all melded into each other within her chest. The room should be air conditioned but her body couldn't stop trembling.

"……Give me……some time."

"That's fine—, but the time limit is tomorrow night."

Ishtar combed her golden hair behind her with her fingers.

"The target is the final day of the assembly; we will present the '*truth*' about the floating archipelago (Lagoon) on the fourth day of the assembly. In that case, it is necessary to access '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' on the third day of the assembly (the day after tomorrow) and preparations the day before are also needed. If so, then we need to talk about the infiltration job by tomorrow night or it'll be poor, you know?"

"I……understand."

……Tomorrow was the limit.

……I have to decide by tomorrow night.

"……"

"Sorry……could I get some rest?"

Without waiting for answers from the other two, she walked towards the bedroom——

.

While feeling her consciousness growing hazy, Ymy collapsed on the bed.

Interlude: Stargazing ——Star Song——

Part 1

What lay before her when she opened her eyes was a wall of star light.

"……"

In the room whose night-colored curtain had been lowered, Ymy slowly opened her eyes.

Tiny, tiny star lights were mixed into the translucent midnight.

They twinkled like grains of sand in the atmosphere of the celestial globe and just when it looked like disappeared, they shined again.

The roof made with transparent glass displayed this scene.

The starry night view.

……People in the past would use this kind of fortune telling with the stars to divine their destinies.

……Though I can't do it.

"_____"

Remaining face up, she turned only her head to the side and looked at the watch at her pillow's side.

Three in the morning.

It could be called the dead of night. It was the deepest time of night when everything was asleep. Within the atmosphere of her room that seemed to also have halted, she started to get up——

"……Huh?"

With her upper body in an upright position, she finally realized that there was a blanket over her shoulders. [14]

She had……went to sleep face down so……the energy to wear this blanket aside, she shouldn't have been sleeping face-up so neatly like this.

——Somebody laid me down properly in bed and put on this blanket?

"Oh, have you woken up?"

That voice came from another bed directly to the side of hers.

"Falling asleep in a fallen position only to wake up in the middle of the night, Ymy-sama is just like a child. It's just like when Isa-chan was young."

Her golden hair was faintly lit up by the starlight.

The tall woman wasn't lying down but instead sat upon the bed hugging her knees.

"……About this blanket"

"It would be a huge issue if you caught a cold. I thought about changing you into your sleepwear from your vestments but that would really wake you up so I refrained."

The Cadres Guard smiled in a carefree manner.

"Thank you……but that appearance is"

"Ishtar is Ymy-sama's guard so she can't just go to sleep without hesitation."

Saying so, she drew the clothed spear closer to herself.

Her clothes were the same formal wear as at noon.

"……That's……that's right."

Syun-rei had also said the same thing before.

When she and Leon left the tower, he would not sleep no matter what she said.

Sennenshi —— like a lion that would not sleep for a thousand years, it was the title associated with the Priestesses of a thousand years ago and their guards. Syun-rei had said that he had said it was that kind of title . [15]

"……"

"What's wrong? If you're hungry, shall Ishtar make something?"

"Then I'd like a dessert that is warm, sweet, delicious, filling and which I can eat for all three meals without gaining weight."

"……That's a difficult problem—. Ishtar's a guard and not a pro chef, after all."

Seeing Ishtar frown with her arms folded, Ymy's expression relaxed a little.

With an expression that was half wry smile and half self-derisive.

"What I must think about now has that feeling to it."

A difficult problem ——— she had thought Priestesses were a lot simpler.

She had thought they only resided on the top floor of the tower and devoted their lives to praying to maintain the barrier with the Queen.

I……didn't become a Priestess with the intention of immersing myself in things like conferences or difficult bargaining.

"That's definitely because Ymy-sama has no Sennenshi , you know?"

Those words echoed through the dark room as if piercing through it.

"According to Ishtar's experience, the Priestess-samas are weak in politics and negotiations. In the current Priestesses, it's Meimel-sama's specialty but she's a bit of a special case. The Priestesses are essentially like Syun-rei-sama. Staying shut in and becoming distanced from the ways of the world, they're also unversed in how to connect with other people. Those who sustain that are the Sennenshi."

"……"

"Included in the tranquility training for Priestesses, there are those for separating the body and mind, right?"

"……Is there something about that?"

Tranquility. In order to continue to pray for the barrier regardless of how severe the circumstances —— so to speak, it was abandoning the flesh to become the barrier.

But she didn't know what that had to do with the current conversation.

"The exact opposite of that are the Sennenshi. Previously, the number one Priestess said that."

The number one Priestess.

"**A Sennenshi is the final wedge that binds together a Priestess' heart and body to prevent them from separating.** For example, if Leon-kun wasn't around, Syun-rei-sama would continue to pray for the barrier just like a doll—"

The mind was influenced by the flesh.

As well, the flesh was influenced by the mind.

"The Sennenshi support the Priestesses at various times and in varying circumstances. If Ymy-sama had a Sennenshi she could trust by her side right now, she would be able to confide these worries with that person."

"……"

Her current guard was Ishtar. That was reality.

However, she was the Cadres Guard and not a Sennenshi. She was not the partner that served a Priestess and could not give advice. [16]

……She had to decide everything on her own.

“Now then, shall I make that thing that Ymy-sama requested not too long ago?”

“……Can you?”

“I can—. I achieved pro level from making desserts to fix I’sa-chan’s mood whenever she sulked. Well then, without delay.”

“Ah, wait.”

Stopping Ishtar who was rolling up her sleeves, Ymy got off the bed.

“……Sorry, the order just now was……half just an outburst.”

“Fumu. So?”

She wasn't angry. She probably understood right from the start. Just like a parent consoling a child throwing a tantrum, she prompted her with a gentle tone.

"Is it okay if I take a stroll through the hotel alone?……I'd like to calm myself."

"Yes. Ishtar will be awaiting you so if there's anything, notify her through telepathy, okay?"

Nodding, she gave her vestments a simple look-over in the full-body mirror. She flattened out the wrinkles that she saw and stretched out her hand to the bedroom's doorknob——

"……I……"

Stopping there, Ymy spoke without turning around.

"I'm not without a Sennenshi……"

"Then what is it?"

"……I'm waiting……I promised that I'd be waiting at the top floor of the tower."

And so.

Without waiting for a reply, Ymy left the bedroom.

Part 2

A gait with no strength. Sometimes staggering and sometimes tripping.

She continued down the hallway lightly illuminated by emergency lighting in search of light like a butterfly.

"……"

……I want to meet him.

……Even though it was this late, she couldn't help wanting to meet with and speak to him.

"*If Ymy-sama has the intention of continuing on as a Priestess from now, she should make the order—*"

A slight taste of iron was mixed in where she was biting on her cheek.

I was frustrated……

She felt like what she should consider the most important as a Priestess was being directly denied but she hadn't been able to counter it which inevitably frustrated her.

"That's definitely because Ymy-sama has no Sennenshi, you know?"

She put her hand against the wall she staggered to and tightened that hand into a fist.

Not minding something like her nails digging into the palm of her hand, she tightened it to the limit.

"……I have……one."

She had decided it a long time ago.

He had said they would be together since a long time ago.

"……"

And then she arrived at a single door.

——Knock, kno……knock.

In her vision blurred by tears, she saw her quivering fist knock on the door.

I won't use the doorbell. Even though it's this late and this slight of a knock, I trust that he will respond. To my voice————

Leaning against the wall directly to her side, Ymy waited for that time.

Two seconds, three seconds.

Five seconds, ten seconds……fifteen seconds.

……Even if it didn't reach now.

……Even if I can't touch him……for now……it's fine if he's just by my side.

She continued that for who knows how long.

The firmly shut door opened without a sound.

My most important person————is here————

"——Ymy?"

"……Please, Sheltis,"

Staring fixedly at the boy with reddish brown hair's face, Ymy wiped the tears at her eyes.

"A little while is fine……just a little……please stay with me."

Part 3

Governmental Sector Central Area, Third Sector aircraft hanger.

"Say, Maha-san, do you believe in astrology?"

The jet black night road looked like paint was smeared over it.

A clear tenor male voice unsuited to the night echoed through the giant container filled with mountains of documents.

"……"

"Fumu, are you not interested? Then please listen so that you become interested."

A tall, lean shadow stood up within the darkness.

A jet black suit with golden buttons, jet black shoes and a jet black rimmed hat. That was an outfit meant to blend into black.

Within the silence of night, only his voice penetrated endlessly.

"The people of old viewed the stars as mysterious. The custom of "star gazing" in the middle of the night was

born and from there, various constellations and asterisms were drawn. Furthermore, meaning was added to those actions and it became ritualistic in “star chants”, and this was the origin of astrology.”

Pale blonde hair waving in the night wind and a shapely nose and mouth.

The brimmed hat worn low over her eyes hid them from view but her silhouette was more than enough to convey her beauty.

“Many people are charmed by this. Sometimes it might be prominent with women. But I think I’d like to deny any ties to this astrology. ……I can’t permit it.”

With a hand upon the hat’s brim, that person turned towards the sky and spread both hands.

“Why must people look about this beautiful sky with such precepts? Even though it would be fine if they just innocently appreciate that moment and brilliance without corrupting it with the human construct of fortune telling. ……Because the stars are this beautiful just by being there.”

Thinking about it with a heart as pure as a child’s……

Even though only looking, praising, stringing together words and singing would be good enough.

"We, the adults, are forgetting something important. Don't you think so?"

"……Igun-I."

For the first time, the other man that had been standing there spoke.

A man of large build wrapped in a faded ocher robe.

The hooded robe covered all the way from his head to his feet and above that in various places —— the parts associated with the neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, waist and knees were bound with a ring apparatus.

"Yes, what is it, Maha-san?"

"……It's time."

Not particularly addressing the pitch black young man 's question, Maha simply conveyed that one sentence.

"The ritual's……preparations will take some time."

"Ahh, that's right. It has to be prepared now."

Without a hint of being upset, Igun-I ruffled his suit.

"……Really."

"Does it really exist? Yes, the shinryoku crystal, '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*', which records all events in this world. **It is incomplete in the end** but it is troublesome to allow the Governmental Sector to continue using it. If a qualified individual is found, my and even Maha-san's private life will be completely bared, you know?"

Heh. He instead smiled deeper with happiness.

"And see, the problem right now is the conference that 's being held. Tenketsu Sophia Palace and the Governmental Sector are not idiots so they should notice that something 's out of place pretty soon. If they use the '*Crimson Eye*' to investigate the truth, a great deal about us will come to light too……it's too early, it is not yet that time."

"……"

"Eh? Of course, as always. Maha-san will break through the front. Please draw out the Holy Hall's guardians. I will secretly change the 'Crimson Eye's'

system using that opening. It'll be more convenient later if we change it to benefit us instead of destroying it."

Igun-I walked straight north along the public road.

Maha who was trailing behind by a few steps leisurely walked up beside him.

"……"

"You wish to know if it's possible to change it? Ahh, I told you it was inviolable before but that's just what the Governmental Sector's researchers think. They have no suitable individuals so they have no way of confirming it . Of course, it's impossible to change it but it is possible to change the circumstances under which events are recorded. ……In other words, we'll just make it so only our information isn't recorded."

Finally, a large shadow came into view.

In the hushed world of the stars and night, a structure cast a shadow even darker than the night.

"Well, even that is something only a perfectly suitable person is able to accomplish."

Looking up at the Governmental Sector from far in the distance, Igun-I softly smiled.

Part 4

"……I see, so that's it."

Sitting on the left side of a two-seater sofa, Sheltis lightly sighed.

"I'm sorry. About this. I'd only get confused on my own. My mind……is filled with a lot of things."

"*It is not your fault. The circumstances are just entwined complexly.*"

Machine Ilis crystal blinked upon her lap while she hung her head.

"……Thank you too, Ilis. Listening to my complaints like this."

"*However, Ymy, if you only look at the urgent situation right now, I can understand what that Cadres Guard wants to say as well. People are powerless against Yuugenshu after all.*"

"Yeah……"

Off-gold.

As the girl sitting quietly on the arm rest of the sofa nodded, her silky long hair shined.

"But……I'm a Priestess. A Priestess has a lot of Guards protecting her, right? Not just the Sennenshi and Regular Guards……it's the same for the Cadet Guards as well. Even so……I'd be posing this towards those protectors? An order much like asking them to become a sacrifice to infiltrate the Governmental Sector……"

"You came here because you don't want to make that sacrifice, right?"

Machine Ilis crystal flashed with a soft blue light as she spoke in a guiding tone.

"This is my intuition but the one who was selected first was Monica, right? Clairvoyance and telepathy are suited skills for infiltration depending on their usage. Looking at it from the surface, she is the most suited to the secret orders this time."

The Priestess remained silent.

She didn't answer and simply hung her head powerlessly.

"I expect that hearing that made you uneasy? Even if you ignore her position as your senpai, you don't know what treatment she would receive if she were to fail the infiltration. As a problem of responsibility, the truth is it would become impossible for her to remain as a Guard. ——That is why you came here."

"……"

"I believe that your choice is not wrong. If I were in the same position, I would undoubtedly do the same. Right, Sheltis ?"

At machine Ilis crystal' words, the downcast Ymy lifted her head.

Her jade eyes that shone like gems gazed ahead——

"Jeez……everything I wanted to say was taken by machine Ilis crystal."

Suddenly loosening his expression, Sheltis let out a deep sigh.

"So the point is we just have to go to that Holy Hall place and access that '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' thing, right? Yuragi-san should know the way there."

"Sheltis!"

His childhood friend sitting next to him shook a little.

"Tha……that's not……it. I-I didn't have that intention ……I-I mean……"

Her lips were trembling.

"Because, you know? Sheltis, you didn't have that intention at first either, right? Infiltrating Governmental Sector's central division……you didn't know about it……you haven't prepared yourself either."

"**I heard about it.**"

To convey it to Ymy who was rapidly speaking, he slowly shook his head.

"Sorry, the truth is Leon told me. But if I asked you, then you'd be surprised so I decided to keep that a secret. That's why it's fine, I'm already prepared——"

"**Stop.**"

That was the instant the voice of the girl beside him turned to a sob.

"Idiot……Sheltis, you idiot. There's no way a Priestess wouldn't be informed of something so important……to say Leon did that……don't……use that kind of impossible lie……"

She tightly hugged the pillow at the corner of the sofa.

——Plop.

A small droplet wet the pillow that she was holding to her chest.

"Sorry……sorry, really……I'm really sorry. I can't do anything on my own……and in the end, I have to rely on you, Sheltis……"

"That's not the case at all. If we're talking about that, to begin with, I can't possibly maintain the barrier that protects the floating continent. It's just that this time, something that I can do has coincidentally shown up."

Orbie Clar

"No……"

She hugged the pillow tightly, more tightly, to the point that its shape changed.

"Not something that I can do as a Priestess. It's that I can't do anything for you as a childhood friend……it's frustrating."

Covering her mouth with the pillow, she shook her head to hide her eyes which had grown red.

And.

Machine Ilis crystal which had been silent on her lap once again flashed blue.

"*Aren't you glad, Ymy?*"

"……Eh?"

"*If you feel frustrated by that, then you still have room to grow. As a Priestess and as a woman. From the point of view of a machine crystal, that 'frustration' of yours is sorrowful but also something that I dearly envy. Right, Sheltis?*"

"That's right, so it's fine."

……Besides.

……I've received more than enough from Ymy.

In this desperate setting, where failure was not an option even more so because of that desperation, Ymy had come this far by relying on herself. That was more gladdening than anything.

"……Sheltis."

His childhood friend that had her face buried in the pillow suddenly looked up.

Her eyes wet with tears immediately drew close —— truly, to the point that their eyes were about to overlap, where their lips and hair could just about touch, she drew near.

"Thank you……I……"

……Ymy?

With her cheeks flushed red as if feverish, her face drew even closer.

……We can't.

……If we get any closer than this, Elbert Resonance will occur.

If his mateki and her shinryoku came into contact, a rejection reaction would occur and injure both of them. Even though he understood that, for some reason he couldn't bring himself to stop her.

"I————————"

"*Eh—, ahem.*"

The stopped time finally began moving again with machine crystal(Ilis)' hem.

"*I'll be jumping in while ignoring the mood but please save that for after the infiltration succeeds.*"

"Th-that, meaning what!? What do you mean!?"

Ymy's eyes shot open with a gasp.

"I-I just wanted to say thank you is all!? B-because Sheltis and I have Elbert Resonance——"

"……Yes, yes, I get it so calm down."

A strained laugh was mixed into machine crystal'[Ilis] voice.

"Now then, since the job of infiltrating the Governmental Sector has been decided, what will you do , Sheltis? You're probably forgetting something important."

"Something important?"

"If the Governmental Sector's giant crystal is a system that uses shinryoku, then its operation will most likely require the usage of shinryoku. But Sheltis' body is carrying mateki and has lost its affinity to shinryoku. That means he cannot access the large crystal."

"Ah……"

Damn it. Because I was only focused on the risk of infiltrating the Governmental Sector's central division, it completely slipped my mind about what to do after the infiltration succeeded.

"Huh? But Ymy entrusted it to me so that means"

"Ah……aha……haha. ……Sorry, I also forgot."

Having calmed down, Ymy laughed.

"*……As expected of childhood friends, you're identical down to the way you think. Well, putting that aside, that problem can be cleared. Well, to put it simply, I am the suited individual for* 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye'."

"Huh?"

"*Fufun, how's that, Sheltis? Have you once again come to realize how outstanding I am?*"

"No, rather why?"

"*Our maker is the same.*"

Machine Ilis crystal cleared away the question smoothly.

"*That giant crystal and I were made by just one person. The* 'Crimson Eye' *is also an observation system that was put in place a thousand years ago. It is the results of people trying to artificially create a* 'certain existence'*. No, perhaps I should say it is a shadow of that.*"

"……One thousand years ago."

"What's wrong, Ymy?"

"Eh? Ahh, no, it's nothing! Keep going!"

*"Then I'll continue. Or so I say, but that's about all I had to tell you. The maker is the same so I also have the program specific to the '*Crimson Eye*'. All this world's events —— I can extract high quality scenes from the measuring of this year's Priestesses not limited to just the images but even the conversations."*

"……Ilis, I'd be really happy if you could read the serious atmosphere?"

Creak.

An unpleasant creaking sound came from the crystal portion of machine[Ilis] crystal that Ymy was holding.

"……Putting aside the jokes, even as a reproduction, that is a dangerous item. I thought it was lost during the war with the Yuugenshu but……I see, even if it wasn't left on the floating continent, it was moved to the floating archipelago[Lagoon]. If the Governmental Sector covered that up, it wouldn't be found."

"Hey, Ilis, what's this about a suitable individual for the '*Crimson Eye*'?"

"*Think of it as an individual entrusted with a key. It's a key that can open a door that holds lots of accumulated information . A fully suitable person can freely obtain that information and a partially suitable person……to say it in an easy to understand manner, they would obtain a mosaicked version of the information. By design, it should only open for a person with a special shinryoku so I don't think any others with a mechanical body other than me could open it.*"

"Other than you……then isn't that quite amazing?"

"It is amazing!"

Ymy's excited voice shook the room's air.

"Think about it, Sheltis. That kind of amazing system and the person who can operate it is also specific. In reality, the Governmental Sector hasn't found a perfectly suitable person yet either. But this close by……above all, that the suitable individual is a machine crystal like Ilis."

With flushed cheeks, Ymy peered at machine[Ilis] crystal.

"Hey, Ilis, is that true? ……I don't want to request something unreasonable but is it really fine to rely on you?"

"*There is no need for concern, Ymy.*"

Machine[Ilis] crystal flashed blue.

"*You've already seen that appearance of mine, right? Then just leave it to me.*"

"——!"

Ymy's gasp was perfectly conveyed.

……That appearance?

……I wonder what it is. I don't understand what shocked Ymy.

"Mm, what is that, Ilis?"

"*We'll talk about it eventually, Sheltis, but it's not something to speak of here. Right now we need to discuss how we're going to sneak into the Governmenetal Sector's central division. ——Right, Ymy?*"

"Y-yes!"

Ymy nodded many times while flustered.

"*In that case, it would be best if we were to rest for today. Tomorrow's conference will also take a long time and a lack of sleep is a girl's worst enemy.*"

"……"

"*Ymy?*"

"……Sheltis."

Ymy fidgeted and held onto the corners of the pillow.

The tears upon her face had disappeared at some point and she was looking downward out of shyness for some reason.

"……Stay like this for just five minutes more."

Chapter 4 – Wheels of Heaven ——Absolute Sanctuary——

Part 1

"Yuragi-chan, sorry—"

With those first words from Ishtar, Yuragi widened her eyes in surprise.

……Sorry? For what?

Today was the second day of the conference. They were currently in the Governmental Sector's waiting room and the assembly in the morning was also on time. The Priestess and General Affairs Bureau Chief were already on standby in the meeting room and the Cadet Guards serving as escorts were also ready in another room.

Everything was going perfectly according to schedule so there shouldn't be anything to apologize for——

"You're getting eye bags, you know?"

"Eh……"

Ishtar smiled teasingly with a finger against her cheek.

"It seems like Ishtar made you stay up all night searching for something."

"……Yeah, I thought I'd hidden it well."

She had fairly heavy foundation around her eyes and the rims of her glasses were perfectly lined up with the darkened parts so it should've been hard to notice.

"Putting aside the bags and glasses, it's really hard on you, Yuragi-chan. You said that your eyes were a little strange last night as well. That they were bloodshot."

"Yes. So I looked for how to get to the hospital……it took some time to find a doctor that was open late into the night. That's why it's not Ishtar-san's fault."

"Fu—n, it'd be great if you get better quickly. You already know the way to the hospital?"

"Yes. I was thinking about going tomorrow when there's no congestion. As planned."

She put a fingertip to the powdered part of her face and nodded.

……It's fine if I don't stress when I talk with this person.

If you just took away the wheedling tone, it gave off the feeling of talking with a competent female secretary.

——It looks like I had you up all night investigating ' Mikuva's Crimson Eye'?

——Yes, it takes a while to find the exact location.

——Do you already know the way?

——We can infiltrate late tomorrow night. As planned.

For 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye', she inquired about what she diagnosed as bloodshot eyes.

Furthermore, to remove any unnatural aspects, she initially made the corners of her eyes the subject and deftly dropped the keyword 'red eyes' naturally.[17]

……Quite the tactician.

……It's becoming more and more clear that her innocent speech pattern is to give others a sense of childishness.

"Did Ymy-sama sleep well yesterday?"

"She woke up once—. She took a walk in the hallway to fix her mood but came back in about thirty minutes. She also got up on her own before Ishtar went to wake her so I think it's fine?"

Resting her head on one hand propped up on the table , the Cadres Guard was gazing somewhere far into the distance.

"It was a pleasant miscalculation. To have regained your footing that much on your own, I've changed my opinion of you."

"Eh?"

"Ahh, nothing, it's nothing, okay—? It's just Ishtar talking to herself."

Waving her hands, she didn't say anything else.

Part 2

In front of the meeting room, in the break room for escorts.

"Sheltis, I've been wondering for a while but……are those circles under your eyes?"

"Eh. Ah, that's right."

Having it gently pointed out by Kagura, Sheltis honestly nodded.

"Did something happen?"

"Well……I couldn't sleep yesterday and pretty much ended up just doing practice swings with my swords? It's not really anything major. My body's not burnt out either."

It was true that he had done practice swings.

——There's no way I can sleep after seeing Ymy's crying face.

She wouldn't leave his mind even after she returned to her room so since he couldn't sleep, he decided to just practice until morning.

"But it looks like there's someone sound asleep over there."

"Huh?"

Sitting in a chair, arms crossed with a complicated expression and eyes closed —— at first glance it might have been someone thinking hard about something but it was just a man sleeping soundly.

"……It's a big-shot, there's a big-shot here."

"Yes. Sheltis should learn from his example."

"……Va……Va……"

Her usual calm expression completely red, the unit leader's fist was shaking.

Then.

"Vaiellllllll, clench your teeth!"

"Ahhn? What's thi……guhaaa!?"

Monica's iron fist of anger plunged into Vaiel's flank without deviation.

"You! Isn't it unfair if you say to clench my teeth and go for my stomach!?"

"M-my hand just slipped! And you——"

In the break room whose rowdiness had just shot up.

"……I'll go wash my face. The circles will disappear if I warm my eyes with warm water, right?"

"Take your time. It will be noisy here for a while anyway."

Leaving a few words to Kagura who was tinkering with the machine (Machina) pearl, Sheltis left the room.

……Tonight, they would secretly assemble in Ymy's room. It would be a business meeting with Yuragi.

Only a vague and lifeless sense of tension swirled within his heart.

Part 3

Room 700, ‘Asterhythm‘.

“Departure is late tomorrow night. ……I’d like to pick a time at the latest possible moment so I’ll send you the exact time tomorrow at noon.

Yuragi’s voice echoed in the living room.

There were no wiretaps installed. She had denied that herself and was also keeping her voice down for the off-chance there were.

“The ones carrying it out are you and I.”

“——Yeah.”

Feeling her gaze through the glasses, Sheltis expressed agreement.

“Ymy-sama as well, do we have your consent?”

"……I chose him. Since I heard there was a skilled Cadet Guard from the Cadet Guard Instructor, Yumelda. "

Ymy indifferently spun together the absolute minimum of words required.

"Monica has the role of an older sister that looks after everyone. In truth, the one pulling up the unit's level is a single dual swords user. It's a boy with a long history of training……if it's just about battle ability, he alone could defeat the opposing unit in the final selections."

The final selections for mission 16, 'Expedition to the Governmental Sector'.

Monica's unit and Nash's unit —— this was something from when Yumelda had brought the examiner, I'sa, along to make an advance report before the two units battled. Without the exchange at this time, it would still be unnatural for a priestess like Ymy to recommend a mere newcomer Cadet Guard like Sheltis.

……Usually she just orders me alone to do harsh training.

……All of this is thanks to Instructor Yumelda, huh.

He inwardly breathed a sigh of relief.

"He received a high appraisal from the Instructor, so I'm recommending him for the mission this time."

"Understood. ——Then let's continue. First, about the defense allotted to the meeting at noon, I'd like to continue it. It would be unnatural if the General Affairs Bureau Chief's guard were to decrease in number and above all, we would lose everything if an emergency situation were to occur at that time. ……This next part is important."

Yuragi's fingers went into her breast pocket.

Without skipping a beat, she drew out a silver card key.

"When you entered the Governmental Sector's governmental office building, I believe each of you received an authentication card."

"……The one we were lent when we entered and had to return when we left yesterday and today, right?"

"Yes. These electronic card keys show when you 'enter ' and 'leave' the lobby."

Guards' badges were also used as an electromagnetic card and those Guards could be traced to wherever they went as long as they were carrying it. It was basically a surveillance system like that.

"After the meeting, the three members of Monica-sama 's unit will take their card keys and pass the lobby to ' leave' but Sheltis-sama will stay within the Governmental Sector's office building."

"……Huh, but wait. Won't my card key be left like that?"

Only three of the escorts' card keys would be returned. It would become suspicious if the one in charge of recovering them were to notice.

"Yes. That's why, Sheltis-sama, please secretly hand me your card key when the meeting ends. I'll pass through the gate with Sheltis-sama's and my own card key. Like that, 'you left the Governmental Sector

according to the electronic surveillance system but are actually still in the Governmental Sector' will become the situation."

"Oh—, I get it. It's something we can do because we have an insider like Yuragi-san. The procedure is simple but I don't think the electronic surveillance system will discover it."

"To tell the truth, this is something that Governmental Sector staff do. If it seems like one will be late to work or one wants to go back at a certain time no matter what, that person will entrust it to a friend."

"After that is……a place to hide?"

Even if he stayed around in the Governmental Sector, there was a lapse of ten hours to the time of the operation . If he didn't hide somewhere, it would be a pain if somebody found him.

"That's right, I've concluded that you should be fine hiding in the men's restroom. Hang up an 'Out of Order' sign and hide inside, please."

"……I have a bad feeling."

In so saying, Yuragi made a mature smile and,

"This is also information. From my point of view, it would be easier if you were to hide in the women's restroom."

"Sheltis? The women's restroom is the holy grounds of women. No matter the reason——"

"That's no good, you know?"

"……I haven't even said anything."

Being glared at by machine (Ilis) crystal and Ymy, Sheltis sighed reluctantly.

"……I'll wait patiently in the men's restroom."

"Then the plan is decided. After that is clothing. Until you reach your destination, you should be able to pass yourself off as 'a colleague of Yuragi' so please choose something other than Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace's formal wear. Do you have anything?"

When she asked that, he immediately thought of his usual black jacket.

"Umm, if it's something that won't be thought of as formal wear, then somewhat."

"That will be fine. Please get changed while in the men 's restroom. I'll hold onto your formal wear after you change."

In other words, there were no preparations to be made beforehand.

It would be fine if he just waited until the end of tomorrow's meeting.

"That's all I have to say. Any questions?"

"Ah, just one. It's not related to the mission but I felt like I had to ask."

While looking around the living room.

"The Cadres Guard isn't here but has this conversation already been relayed to her?"

"I will inform Ishtar-sama afterwards. She knows the contents of the mission but she has not been told that you are the one that shall be carrying it out. ……She should be waiting for me at the intersection outside this room."

Audibility was not limited to this room. Her role was to divert anybody about to come close to the room.

"I see, then that's all I had to ask."

"Then I'll be counting on you for tomorrow. That will be all for today."

The female secretary closed her memo book.

With that as a signal, the Priestess in her vestments was the first to stand up.

"Umm……I don't think I'll get a chance other than now to say it, so I will."

Her jade green eyes wavered with unease.

She gulped and then.

"Make sure you come back. Nobody will blame you even if you fail……so come back safely."

"——Roger that."

Replying with his outstretched right hand, Sheltis left the Priestess' room.

He passed the door and entered the hallway. Walking straight down the hallway with a thin carpet, he finally came upon the intersection that led to other guest rooms.

"Ah, are you fiiinished?"

In the middle of the intersection, a female Guard stood still with a metal spear in hand.

Her strangely colored clothing that was bound with belts in various places made her silhouette that stood out against the light seem even thinner —— no, it looked sharpened.

"Yes, it's fine if you return to the room now. The Priestess-sama is also waiting."

"Is that sooo? Ah— that's great! It feels meritless to be standing guard in a hallway with thi—s few people. Ishtar was so unoccupied, she felt like she'd fall asleep."

Faa, she yawned loudly.

……It looks like I can safely avoid making unnecessary conversation.

With just a small greeting, he tried to pass by her.

"The only one I had to send back was Monica-san."

He should have just ignored her and continued on.

He should've known that in his head but his feet had stopped and he'd turned around before he even realized.

"I think that was about thirty minutes ago? Monica-san looked pretty serious asking, have you seen a member of my unit, Sheltis? Well, thanks to that, Ishtar also realized 'Ah—, so that's who Ymy-sama chose'."

"……So then,"

"I just told her the necessary part. There's a special mission being given to him so he's in the middle of a conversation in the Priestess' room, is what I told her. Really, it was just the part that wouldn't be a hindrance."

A large smile.

There was just a tiny bit of thorniness to that expression.

"You covered for Monica and took on the job yourself. I didn't say a～ny such thing so don't worry, okay? Monica-san wouldn't be able to remain calm if I said that."

"……"

What she just smoothly told him was something that couldn't be conceived without knowing that he was better than Monica at stealthy activities.

……As I thought, has she realized my identity?

"Shall I reveal the source of the trick? I'sa-chan said it."

Ishtar moved one step closer.

"A dual swords user who's as cheeky as he is strong. That there's a guy who's not so strong he makes you want to run away, he's so strong that he makes you not

want to lose. If I'sa-chan goes that far in saying it, you have enough ability to cover for Monica-san and take her place. It's natural to think like that, isn't it?"

……What I'sa said to her as the basis.

……So does that mean she hasn't discovered my identity yet?

"But you're really silent. Are you nervous? Or are you thinking about something?"

She smiled with a finger against her lips.

"Well, it's fine whichever it is. Ishtar doesn't mind after all—. Ishtar doesn't have any interest in it. Not in any of the other Guards or the Priestess-sama."

"_____"

"See ya—, I'll leave Monica-san up to you."

Waving her hand with a cheery expression, she left in a manner that looked full of openings at first glance.

……Not a single thing has changed since four years ago.

"Well then, boy, why don't you try asking by force?"

Not a single thing had changed since that time.

She still hadn't become a Sennenshi and she still had no interest in the Priestesses. She didn't hold any interest in whether the Elite Guards around her became Sennenshi or even if they were to retire.

"Are you thinking about something?"

"……No, let's go."

It happened at the same time machine Ilis crystal agreed. As Sheltis was about to take the first step, the silhouette of a person appeared from a corner of the intersection.

"……Sheltis."

It was a girl with her eyes wide-open, her sakura-colored hair fluttering.

"Ah, hey, Monica——"

"Don't speak."

"……Eh."

"It's fine if you don't say it. Just listen……I'll even want to stop thinking about hitting you."

Her slender shoulders shook a little at a time.

She bit down on the edge of her lip and also breathed deeply to remain calm —— that painfully conveyed it to him directly.

"I heard about your mission from Cadres Guard Ishtar . I don't have the right to ask what kind of mission it is but……truthfully, I'm against it. I think it's a given that you'd be chosen based on ability. But you're my…… important……important……"

Gulp.

He clearly heard her gulp.

"Member of……my unit, and I won't let you go on a mission I don't even know the reason for, even if it's an

order from the Cadres Guard. ……Because that's how it is, right? If I can't even be informed of what the mission entails, it's the same as saying that it's dangerous."

Her intuition was correct. That's why Ishtar didn't beat around with half-baked lies and had no choice but to tell the truth.

"No, it's not like my opposition means anything. Anything a Cadet Guard like me says would just be overruled……"

A lifeless smile appeared on the unit leader's face.

"So come back safely, regardless of whether the mission succeeds or fails. That's all I wanted to say as the unit's leader. The scolding will come after that."

"……Don't worry. I'll return in the early morning."

I don't have any intention of being beaten by a mission or two like this.

To begin with, 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye' is just a means to an end. The goal is still to find the objective behind the

Yuugenshu breeding water tank and to stop the person behind it, which is why we came as far as the Governmental Sector.

"Well then, let's go back. Our paths are the same for a while anyway."

"……Yeah."

Pushing on Monica who had an awkward expression, Sheltis started to walk again.

Part 4

The third day of the conference.

"Jeez, now Monica has circles under her eyes?"

Same as yesterday, Kagura's sigh pierced through the break room's silence.

"……I tried to hide it though."

"Just the area around your eyes is caked in foundation. It's easy to understand that you're hiding something

around your eyes. Please practice using cosmetics a little ……ah—ah, this is so thickly coated. Come on, stay still."

Kagura took out powder from a travel-use cosmetics kit. While she was applying that to the area around Monica's eyes, her hand stopped.

"Yesterday was Sheltis and today Monica has circles under her eyes? Surely you two aren't having clandestine meetings every night, are you?"

"I was just thinking about escorting matters and couldn't sleep."

Monica closed her eyes with a glum face.

"Rather than that……I'm happy that you're fixing my make-up, but I'd rather it be at a different place."

"Nobody will come."

"No, I mean here is……"

Her cheeks went red with embarrassment.

"……It really is kinda of embarrassing in front of guys."

"It's fine. Showing these kinds of openings every little while is also a technique."

"It doesn't matter what a woman with no appeal does. "

With that sentence from Vaiel who was reclining in a chair, both of the ladies' eyebrows rose.

"Ah— you said it! Then please look. Come on, Monica, stay still and we'll show that blockhead my high-class techniques——"

"Y-you idiot, Kagura! Stop, don't use my face as an experiment!"

The unit leader fratically stopped Kagura who pulled out strange small tools.

"It's amazing, isn't it."

"She has strength."

"Monica probably spent the entire night thinking about you. She's a kind person; I understand why Ymy calls her senpai and is emotionally attached to her."

"……I'll do my best not to worry her."

Looking up vacantly at the ceiling, Sheltis' unfocused eyes wandered.

——It's almost noon.

The meeting is scheduled to end at five in the evening. At the same time, I start with meeting up with Yuragi and handing her my card key. Then I slip away and hide myself.

……After five hours.

He had polished and replayed the same image in his head countless times. Even though what he had to do itself was simple, he couldn't settle himself no matter how many times he repeated it.

Part 5

Ten at night.

The Governmental Sector's surveillance system obtained the number of people remaining in the office

building by doing a simultaneous scan for all electronic card keys. Buildings with nobody left in them had their lights turned off. At the same time, areas with nobody in them had passages set in them so that non-staff members could not pass through.

……With this, the first issue is cleared.

Masking his breathing in a stall in the men's bathroom, he had been doing deep breathing for several hours.

The area he was hiding had its lights turned off all at once. In other words, it served as proof that an outsider like Sheltis had been recognized by the surveillance system to have 'left the building'.

"It looks like Yuragi-san did her part."

"……Now we just have to wait."

He was biding time.

Whether one or many areas had their lights turned off, until infiltration became easy.

"……Ilis, I think it's fine if we talk a little now."

"In a low voice, sure. If we're too loud and get found, all our hard work up until now will come to nothing."

Restraining his voice to the limit, Sheltis continued on in what was pretty much talking to himself.

"……There was something I changed my mind about yesterday."

"Are you nervous about the infiltration that'll be happening right now or something?"

No —— Sheltis wordlessly shook his head at machine Ilis crystal who was shaking at his chest.

"See, I was glad that Ymy and I could come here together for this mission but……maybe I shouldn't be happy with that kind of thing."

"……Because your goal lies further ahead of that. Being together on a mission is a nice point of contact but it would be bad to be satisfied with that?"

"That's what I think."

The impetus was last night. When Ymy came to him with a request. He was happy that she'd come to consult

him. Certainly, he had thought that the day before yesterday, but that was wrong.

"It really was wrong of me to make Ymy cry back then ."

Maybe if he wasn't a Cadet Guard, but a Sennenshi.

Maybe if he was……not cursed with a mateki-ridden body, he should have been closer to her than anyone and comforted her before she had come to worry that much.

"You're starting anew to become Ymy's Sennenshi. Don't forget your initial resolution."

"Right……sorry, that's all I wanted to say."

"Okay."

The curtain of silence once again descended——

How much time has passed since then?

It's easily close to ten hours since the meeting.

When the feeling of waiting ceased to be a feeling and his sense of time froze.

——Clack.

In the unlit men's restroom, the sound of high heels that shouldn't have been present rang out.

"It's Yuragi. Sorry to keep you waiting."

"……I'm a little tired; it's the first time I've ever holed up at a toilet so long."

He saw a woman he recognized through the open door .

"Everything's an experience."

Wearing a business smile, the secretary turned around.

"Our destination is building four, section 31, where we 'll sneak into the underground with an elevator on the eastern end. By the way, our current location is building two, section 61. It's a long way from building two to building four……let's get walking?"

"It's fine even if it takes time, so please use a safe route ."

"Of course. I also wish to avoid the surveillance cameras to the best of my ability so please follow me exactly as if tracing my footsteps."

Oozing resolve from behind her glasses, Yuragi started walking. Sheltis followed after her with his breathing suppressed.

Part 6

Click——clack——

Footsteps echoed in the corridor. Sometimes they would pass through large meeting halls and sometimes they would use the emergency stairs.

……It's more complicated than a real labyrinth.

……Rather than the security system or security workers, this is the best defense system.

I should memorize the route as much as possible. Realizing just how naive that notion was, Sheltis inwardly clicked his tongue.

"_____"

Yuragi, who was continuing on ahead wordlessly, came to a stop just before reaching the intersection.

"You've been peeking backwards since a little while, so are you wary of being followed?"

"No. You're the one catching my interest."

The woman turned around with a rare bitter smile.

"Your footsteps are so quiet that it makes me uneasy……even though I came here with boots that have low sound output, I've only been able to hear my own footsteps for a while."

"This is also part of an escort's job. It would bother the protege if the escort's footsteps were too loud, right?"

"Ah, that's my line."

"Because—, if Ilis doesn't talk about something, it feels like she might die of boredom."

"I'll remember that. But please try to refrain from talking."

She cleared away the wry smile on her face. Just when he thought she was going to start walking, she pulled out the card key in her breast pocket.

"There is a door just ahead of this intersection that serves as the connection to building four. It is a combination of Tenketsu Palace's Mechanical Bureau and Sophia Shinryoku Theory Bureau which analyzes the Priestesses' shinryoku information……you could say this building itself is a research organization. The other buildings take precedence over it publicly but it likely trumps the other three buildings combined in terms of classified information."

A steel mechanical door was illuminated by a green emergency light. It was massive and solemn. Without Yuragi's explanation, it would give off the overwhelming pressure of the entrance to a jail.

——Counterfeit check……'Normal'——

——IC level check……'Second class'——

——Unlocking the gate. Please enter within twenty seconds.——

In response to the card key that Yuragi held out, the door's central portion lit up. Just like the sea splitting apart, the tightly shut mechanical door began opening to the sides.

"This is section 1 and section 31 is further in."

"Can I ask you one thing? I don't think section 31 was on the map we received in the lobby."

"It is as you surmised. I'll explain as we walk."

Just as her words indicated, she walked not too slowly and not too quickly.

"It's a 'stray section' that shouldn't exist. There are many areas in this building called that by the staff that work here. On the map, it looks like there was simply a planning error resulting in a blank space or it's just a garbage collection area……amongst them is a room that contains secrets of the highest confidentiality which regular staff can never come to know of."

"And that's section 31 in this building?"

"Yes. As for how many of them are in each building, probably only the elder of the senate knows everything. I don't know anything except the count."

They walked straight north and more north.

They mindlessly continued down the empty corridor devoid of sounds and people.

"It's a little late but I must confess that it was unexpected."

He thought about the implied meaning in her words a little and——

"That I came along and not Monica?"

"Yes. I thought it would be Monica-sama and bet a lunch on it……but it's a pity. I lost to Ishtar-sama."

"……Does that mean"

"Yes. Ishtar-sama bet that it would fall to you yesterday. She also added that Ymy-sama would select you herself. Pardon me, but are you an acquaintance of Ishtar-sama's?"

"……I shouldn't be."

"Is that so……it's nothing, I was just a little curious."

A little childishness showed through in her smile.

However, that smile was also wiped away in an instant and she suddenly came to a stop ahead of him.

What stopped her was —— a giant door lit with emergency lights.

"It's an emergency exit."

"Would this kind of suspicious authentication[reader] device be on a normal emergency exit?"

Poking out on the side of the door was a box-shaped device.

"Please imagine a revolving door. Without a password , it's just an ordinary emergency exit but only when authenticated with a special staff member's authority, it will connect to the elevator within."

——Counterfeit check……'Normal'——

——IC level check……'Second class'——

——Unlocking the gate. Please enter within twenty seconds.——

From behind the door came the sound of a large motor . With a little rumbling underfoot, The sound of two things joining together roared out.

"Fuu. Now then, Sheltis-sama."

Looking fixedly at her card key, she pushed it against his chest.

"Please take this."

"……But this is Yuragi-san's card key."

"The elevator ahead of here is for a single person only. Furthermore, you must have a staff member's authority to move it —— that is to say, you require the authority that my card key possesses."

She bowed with a smile.

That lonesome gesture conveyed everything. She would only come this far.

"This is as far as I can guide you. Please make sure to return my card key, okay?"

"……Thank you."

He held fast to the card key given to him.

Turning his back on Yuragi who still had her head bowed deeply, Sheltis walked on.

Part 7

——She was staring up at the night sky.

The night celestial sphere could be seen through the dome made of glass. She wasn't looking at the stars or

the moon and was just in the mood to aimlessly stare at the sky to put everything out of her mind.

……It should be right around now.

……Sheltis should be infiltrating the Governmental Sector around now.

"Ymy-sama is romanticist, huh—. Have you come to like this room?"

A voice that was casual and sweet no matter the place.

Coaxing? No, it's like the kind a mother uses to placate a child……it's that kind of voice.

"Ishtar-san, do you not like the starry sky?"

"Mm～, I don't hate it but I don't think about wanting to look at it forever. I'd rather see I'sa-chan than stars and if I can't have that, then I'd choose to train."

Ishtar was holding a towel that was a little wet. Ymy thought she had gone to the bathroom but not even a few minutes had passed before she returned. Her clothes were the same formal wear as well.

……Come to think of it, it's been the same for three days.

"You're fast at taking a bath."

"I always take a quick bath—. Ah, but I haven't really taken a bath in a few days? I've just been wiping myself with a wet towel."

That was the first she'd heard of that. She had thought she was at least taking a quick shower.

"……Are you also holding back on taking a bath?"

"Until we get back to Tenketsu Palace. We don't know when an enemy might attack."

Sophia

"You haven't been sleeping enough since we came here either."

"Yes, that's why I'm looking forward to going back home—. I want to roll around in bed."

……She'll go that far to guard me?

……Even though she's not a Sennenshi, and even though she only came along specially for this regardless of her will.

"Is it strange? Well, if I had to say the truth, it can't be helped that guarding's a pain. Umm, that's not specifically directed at Ymy-sama or anything, okay? I don't want to act out the role of a Sennenshi. That's why I remain as an Elite Guard."

"……That's unexpected."

Rather than shocked, she was more surprised.

"In that case, you didn't have to accept being my escort……"

If it was a mission on the level of guarding a Priestess, not even an Elite Guard could refuse. But they could be exempted if they had prior business and there was even more assuredness if they were to claim to be in bad condition. A Guard of Ishtar's level should also know that.

"This time is special. Ishtar also has an ulterior motive."

She rested a tuft of her hair in her palm.

"I have a goal. If I didn't escort Ymy-sama like this, I wouldn't have a chance to come to the Governmental Sector. Well, in reality, even if Ishtar comes to the Governmental Sector, the chances of her goal being conveniently accomplished are low."

"That is——"

"It's, a, secret. This is something Ishtar's even keeping secret from I'sa-chan, so it's also a secret to Ymy-sama. ……Ah, but there's another reason that Ishtar's doing a relatively firm job of guarding Ymy-sama."

"I'm understanding this less and less."

The inside of her head seemed to have become mixed up so Ymy made no efforts to hide a frown.

"Umm……so the truth is you didn't want to guard a Priestess but Ishtar-san, you had an ulterior motive that motivated you to come here to the Governmental Sector? But the reason that you're looking after me so well is…… for a different reason?'

"That's it—. If Ymy-sama goes to sleep obediently, then I guess I'll talk about it?"

Shiver. With it pointed out so accurately, she took a step backwards without thinking.

She was busy thinking about Sheltis who had headed to the Governmental Sector and couldn't sleep. That took no small amount of mind reading. Really, this Elite Guard is discerning in everything.

"……I get it. I'll do my best to sleep."

That's why I want to know. Why is someone who so openly states that guarding a Priestess is a pain guarding me so attentively like this?

"It's for distinction."

Unexpected words leaked out from the Cadres Guard's lips.

"Are the Priestess-samas satisfied with the Guards in the tower right now?"

"……Eh?"

"Ishtar isn't satisfied at all. I'sa-chan who just became a Regular Guard is out of the question. Everyone else is weak, too weak. I've thought the same thing for many years……but just a little, there were also kids amongst them that stood out. Like Horn-chan or Leon-kun."[18]

The third Sennenshi, Mechanically Armored Soldier Ex Machina Horn Nova.

The fifth Sennenshi, Great Sword User Leon Nestrius Ohva.

The names she had just given had both already become Sennenshi.

"Ishtar knew one more that was better than or at least on par with those two. There was a disparity between his strength and emotions but it was a child that would have become a Sennenshi within a few years."

Who would that be? Who is the Guard that could rival those two that she's talking about?

"The reason Ishtar is properly guarding Ymy-sama is in deference to that child with a little bit of a feeling of atonement. Because I pushed something troublesome onto him."

"……"

The person that she had pushed something troublesome onto. Is her guarding me sincerely connected with atonement to that person?

……That would mean.

……With that manner of speaking, the one that comes to mind is———

"Ishtar-san, what are you thinking?"

"You'll come to understand. You'll also come to know Ishtar's goal when the time comes."

She turned around.

Her side profile was coldly sharpened to the point that Ymy's spine froze up.

Part 8

The Holy Hall.

It was a giant room and corridor.

If you looked, the stone floor to the point that you could see each individual strand of hair reflected in it. There were numerous large lights on the ceiling that filled the room with a blinding amount of light.

"……Now then, what's gonna come out?"

"What would you do if it was a cute girl?"

"No way. On the contrary, if someone like that came out here, it would actually be weird……ah, but maybe."

"So a girl really would be good?"

"If it's one that I can talk to."

Biting his lips shut, he leered at the light-filled passage ahead.

——There's nobody.

Examining the surroundings for presences, he continued on step by step.

"Hey, Sheltis, what do you mean by talk to? With somebody from the Governmental Sector? Having come this far?"

"……There's what we talked about Yuragi-san just before. About Ymy."

That Ymy relied on herself and entrusted the 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye' to him.

"When we reach Mikuva's Crimson Eye, the mystery from that time we went with Leon to the floating archipelago (Lagoon) will be solved too, right?"

"Most likely. The outline of the Governmental Sector's plans as well."

"Can we investigate things outside of the Governmental Sector too?"

"What do you mean?"

"……No, sorry. I just wanted to try asking."

Within his swirl of thoughts, there was one suspicion that was continued to be lodged and wouldn't flow.

"Last night, I thought about something while talking with Ymy. How to put it……is this really the work of the Governmental Sector?"

With him assuming the position of Ymy's consultant, he felt a calm that wasn't there until then and was able to sort out the information related to this case.

The floating archipelago (Lagoon) that lay on the boundary of the areas under the Governmental Sector's surveillance. The research facility and Yuugenshu that were there.

"I also understand that it's clear that the Governmental Sector is suspicious. I think the chances of that are still over ninety percent."

"What about the remaining ten percent?"

"……I don't know. But I wonder what it is. Maybe it's the Governmental Sector's attitude. For the meeting, why did they have the confidence to call us all the way here to their territory?"

The Governmental Sector had confidence. That might be the confidence that even with the conference, they could manage to hide it or maybe there was some other plan.

……It's just that if that's true.

The identity of that golden spellcaster, Maha, might become more of a mystery.

"……"

"In response to your earlier question, if you specify the time and place, it is possible to search the 'Crimson Eye'. I think the chances of it displaying nothing are high though."

"I got it, thanks."

At any rate, just continue on. If he didn't find the all-important item, then all the hard work to arrive here would come to nothing. ……Above all else, he would have failed Ymy.

"Straight ahead?"

"Since there are no other paths to take. Whether it's a trap or anything else, we have to keep going."

The ten metre-wide hall stretched on endlessly.

Along the sides of the corridor were countless stone pillars with arches at the top that supported the ceiling. The design was highly reminiscent of a temple or something similar.

……This large size is curious.

There might be several hundred metres in a straight line. He had snuck in quite deep since separating from Yuragi at the elevator but it was just like having a giant underground cave.

"Ilis, it's a little late to ask but are there any security devices?"

"Not as far as I saw. It's an area known only to a handful of Governmental Sector insiders so there might not be any so as to not leave behind visual data."

"I see, well that makes sense."

It was a place called the Holy Hall. To protect their secrets, they couldn't set any security devices precisely because this place was so important. It was difficult to get here but after reaching the Holy Hall, all they had to do was proceed.

"……A door."

It had been several minutes of walking while surveying the surroundings.

Before his eyes, a solemn and shiny door crafted with brass and silver could be seen.

"It doesn't seem to require anything like a key."

"Roger. It looks like a regular door that opens to the sides so I can open it……"

His breathing caught before he decided that in his mind.

——Somebody's here.

A heavy pressure that overwhelmed others just by being there. It was somebody with an absolute existence that he'd felt only a few times even in Tenketsu Palace.[Sophia]

……It's the same one as that time.

On the first day of the conference, the presence that had enveloped the entire of the Governmental Sector's office building.

"Ilis, construct the swords."

He ordered machine crystal[Ilis] to construct the dual swords and did nothing but stare ahead. Towards the direction that he could most feel the crushing pressure from.

"An intruder……hasn't it been a long time?"

The large figure of a person appeared from the stone pillar ahead and to the right without a sound.

『ミクヴァの緋眼（ひがん）』を擁する、
これより先は
不可侵なりし絶対の聖域

特務機関『天の車』より、
『第一』のゼアドール、
貴様を排除する

No, that wasn't the figure of a person —— it was a fully metallic mace longer than an adult. The cylindrical handle was thicker than a grown man's arm and the cylindrical pommel atop it was such that it was debatable whether Sheltis could wrap his arms around it. He couldn't imagine how much it weighed altogether.

"Surely there's no way you don't know of the treasure that lies ahead of here? If so……"

A defective product way too large for a person to use.

He was carrying that easily with one hand.

"From here on is the inviolable, absolute Holy Hall. As the 'number one' of the secret military force 'Heaven's Wheel' tasked with guarding the Holy Hall, Zeadoll, I shall eliminate you —— overcome me with your magnificent skills."

He was a large man that towered over Sheltis.

The gray longcoat worn over a thin black overshirt could not hide the man's muscles which could be seen swelling within.

His scorched-earth-colored hair was cut short and bristled up and his grey eyes forcefully conveyed his gallantry.

……He's the Holy Hall's guardian.

He could feel the cold sweat traveling down his cheek.

The secret military force 'Heaven's Wheel', an executive unit of the Governmental Sector's. ……I knew they'd have a secret military unit like this. It was something I had a vague image of. In case Maha Golden was part of the Governmental Sector, I made the resolution to fight with whatever unit he would belong to.

……Maybe I should be happy that Maha's not here?

It was easy to imagine his battle form. Without technique, schemes or traps, he would just use the premieval method of pulverizing his opponent with his own power. Moreover, Sheltis was also bad at planning.

Now then, what to do.

First, he would ascertain Zeadoll's movements and then move to counterattack——

"……"

"……"

But the guardian made no indications of attacking whatsoever. On the contrary, he was casting a questioning look over with expectant eyes.

"……It's your move."

"What?"

"State your name."

He swung his extremely heavy mace around and lined it up with Sheltis' line of sight.

"Although I have named myself, it would be lacking in manners. Name yourself."

"……Sheltis."

"You idiot, why did you say your real name?"

"……Ah, cra——"

His voice came out without thinking in response to Ilis ' reprimand. If that man knew the names of Tenketsu Palace's Guards, then he would know his goal and his background. However——

Sophia

"I see, so Sheltis. For having the ability to infiltrate up to this Holy Hall, first allow me to praise you admirably. "

……Eh, perhaps.

……Did he ask for my name just to say that?

"Furthermore, you have seen through my strength and naturally readied your swords. That is also praiseworthy. "

"……Haa, why thanks."

"However!"

Zeadoll's bellow shook the atmosphere throughout the entirety of the Holy Hall.

"This Holy Hall is absolute holy territory with me here . Not a single intruder has permitted to date. That's why,

Sheltis —— overcome me with your magnificent skills. If you take even one step past this border, I will stay silent and overlook you."

"……Is that okay?"

"I swear on my honor. I have never deceived an enemy within my lifetime."

"……"

Looking at his eyes, it was clear that he was not lying.

This man had the full intention of allowing him to go to 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye' if he acknowledged his loss. That was because he knew that the adversity of not being allowed to lose would cause further growth for himself.

……Sheesh, his calculations are completely messed up.

……It's the type I'm worst with.

Feeling the man's intimidating air, Sheltis let out an honest wry smile.

"This is troubling……it would've been a lot easier with some crafty type. It's unexpected that someone like you would be in the Governmental Sector."

"Fumu. But your eyes don't seem to be saying that?"

"_____"

"There is no deceit within those eyes. Judging from your dignity and conviction, you came to the Holy Hall prepared for a confrontation with me, did you not? The way you act says so."

They were words that shook the air.

Wordlessly taking them on —— the corners of Sheltis' lips raised. It wasn't the wry smile from before but the childlike smile that he showed to those he knew in Tenketsu Palace.
Sophia

……Of course.

……Despite saying how hard it is.

"I'm not good with those kinds of stances."

"Is that so?"

"Jeez……like this, Maha would've been better. Enough that I wish he'd switch with you."

But there was no reaction to Maha's name.

……Is it a principal of not speaking to allies? It would be a given with this man's personality.

"Fumu. Then let's start."

The instant he prepared his swords again.

A storm and rumble in the ground shook the sanctuary at the same time.

A heavy pressure seemed to be weighing on the back of his head. A chill down his spine stiffened him up to his fingertips.

——So fast!?

He crouched low enough to skim the ground. An instant after that. With the force of a cannonball, the silver mace stormed through the area directly above his head. That force passed by Sheltis and went towards the stone pillar behind him without stopping.

Crush.

The towering stone pillar had been reduced to countless fragments by a single hit from the mace. And it was done as easily as putting a spoon into pudding.

"An admirable reaction."

The treasure guardian pulled out the mace planted into the stone pillar. Just a moment ago, he should've been ten metres ahead but now he was standing leisurely ten metres to the rear.

Looking at the rubble of the stone pillar, the destructive power made him gulp.

……So this is why there are no surveillance cameras.

He already had the unrestrained large-scale destruction force and bizarre mobility to be called a weapon. Even if someone tried to take a picture of him

obliterating the enemy, the dust that would show up on the camera would make it completely meaningless.

"Let's go."

By the time that voice reached him, the guardian wasn't at that place anymore.

Stomp —— a gale stirred up at his feet and Zeadoll's giant body had already moved to right in front of him. A normal person would have undoubtedly gotten the mistaken impression that he had warped.

"Sheltis!"

Machine Ilis crystal let out a warning.

……I can't stop it with the dual swords.

It was like stopping a cannonball with a knife. It wouldn't even deflect.

"——Tch!"

The mace was swung down with a roar. He calculated the path it would take and shifted over by half a step, moving in towards Zeadoll.

"Hoh."

The guardian's eyes widened slightly.

The center of the swirling gust that the mace had stirred up —— it could even be called the eye of the hurricane, the place closest to Zeadoll was a safe zone. Only the dual blades made unilateral sense.

Phew. Breathing out, he gathered strength into the grip on his two swords without a break.

The target is the tip of the chin.

It would deliver a shock to the spine if struck horizontally with the tip of the sword and paralyze the brain's nervous system control. It was a strike that would cause a person to faint no matter what.

……It's decided.

Matching with the mace's downswing, he swung his sword up to counter. Perfect timing, it can't be dodged. With that assuredness, he would strike the tip of the chin with the back of his sword. At the same time——

Scraaaape!

With a dull sound, the dual swords forged with Hyouketsu crystals was deflected.

"……Wha!?"

It wasn't the sensation of a human body. The chin's bone? No, that's not it; it was heavier and more solid, a tough metal. Like a giant lump of steel or an even greater impact.

"There are no openings in my Sanctuary Arts."

With spear-like vigor, Zeadoll swung down his left elbow.

The strike that should've defeated him had been meaningless. The momentary opening that surprise caused wasn't overlooked and he felt the guardian's counterattack sink into his flank.

"Guu……!"

He barely defended with his left elbow.

Crunch. His face distorting from the impact he felt from his bones, he still looked up. The guardian closed

the gap with flowing movements and swung the mace sideways in succession.

Smack.

Pressing on his numb left elbow with his right hand, he jumped up.

Watching the cylinder at the end of the mace, Sheltis stepped on the back of the cylinder. Landing sideways on the curved cylinder, he then flew up tracing a triangle until just about grazing the ceiling.

……Did he say Sanctuary Arts?

……As long as I don't know how he did that defense earlier, I'll have to start with getting rid of his attack options.

He would cut that mace with his swords.

When Zeadoll stopped moving after a miss, he would focus on the thinnest part of that mace. Accelerating through free fall, he swung the sword in his right hand with all his might——

"I'll take it."

Seeing that, Zeadoll's smile deepened.

Would he pull back the mace or swing it up? It wasn't either of those two options that Sheltis expected —— the treasure guardian swung up his own bare hand.

"His own arm!?"

His sword's momentum wouldn't stop. The blade of Hyouketsu crystals would cleave that trained right arm. That bloody image flitted through the back of his mind.

Screeeeeeeee……eeee……chh……hh……!

A sound without literary equivalent echoed through the Holy Hall.

Just like a crystal handbell would make, it was a cold and high-pitched sound.

"……No way."

He descended silently with his dual blades in hand and this time Sheltis was truly without words. There was no issue with the swords' blades. Not a single……not one drop of the blood that should have been clinging to it was there.

The swords that he'd swung down with all his strength had been completely stopped by the point of the man's elbow.

"Mu."

Staring at the torn part of his coat near his elbow, Zeadoll put a finger to it. His brown arm was showing from the gap in the coat's fibres. It was just slightly but something red was oozing.

"You broke through my defense with a small sword like that……?"

"……Broke through?"

He furrowed his brows at the unexpected words.

This was the second time. The feeling transmitted through his swords was solid and it was not a defense that could be pulled off using the hardness of muscle or bone. Something more firm……diamond? No, stronger than that. Something close to the solidity of Hyouketsu crystals.

And then there were the words he used to describe his arts.

"Manifesting the properties of shinryoku in a tangible form is of the Worship line of spells."

"……The same style as Monica, huh."

Monica applied a coating of silvery-white crystals Rosario infused with shinryoku to her crossed rods and used that to fight.

This man was likely of that type. The difference was —— as opposed to Monica who manifested it as silvery-white, he hadn't manifested the shinryoku as a special material.

"Then is it a conceptual materialization?"

"Hoh, so you know of my Sanctuary Arts."

With an affirmation made with admiration, Zeadoll narrowed his eyes to needles.

Conceptual materialization.

Imagining and manifesting the shinryoku was the same as with Monica. The difference was in how it was done. Instead of imagining something concrete, this man was likely manifesting shinryoku with a vague concept like 'something hard and firm that's also colorless and transparent'.

"……It's the first time I've seen something like it aside from the Hyouketsu Kyoukai; so it really exists."

"I would think so. It's an extremely high-level technique."

The primary example of conceptual materialization was actually the Hyouketsu Kyoukai created by the five Priestesses.

Whatever the concrete image used was a private matter of the Priestesses' but the manifestation of ' Hyouketsu crystals' into the world was also an application of conceptual materialization.

"Casters that apply this to battle are exceedingly rare so I've only seen two others in the past myself. To begin with, it's not a spell that can be used by just anybody."

In Tenketsu Palace, only somebody on the level of the Priestesses could use it and none of the Guards could. So to speak, while it was a technique that was forgotten, it was still being passed down here in the Governmental Sector.

Sophia

"A secret art passed down to the protector of the sanctuary."

"Indeed. However, the successive generations of guardians were too dependent on this ability and neglected to train. ……You understand what that means, do you not?"

He held the mace that exceeded his own body weight with one hand. Holding its tip in his direction, the current generation's guardian declared as if in song.

"That technique's just an extra?"

Jumping lightly from that spot, he flew over the rubble underfoot.

"I would say so. No matter how much you factor in the conceptual materialization, it's still an unusual amount of endurance. It can't be explained away with just the spell so there's no other way but for his body to have been forged to the limit to begin with."

This man's strength was not in the Sanctuary Arts.

He was a seeker of strength.

He was not haughty about his exceptional body, had no shred of self-conceit, instead spending each day training to conceive this result. Even if the Sanctuary Arts had not been passed onto this man, he would have discovered a substitute for it on his own.

"Let's go."

"He's coming."

Before machine Ilis crystal' warning, Sheltis had already jumped directly to the side. Instantaneously reacting, Zeadoll read his route and kicked up rubble.

"Hah!"

He blew back the countless fragments of rubble with his swords. A single fragment became ten and ten became twenty. He launched an attack on Zeadoll with the might of a machine gun. In front of the barrage of boulders, the guardian calmly picked up speed and came charging.

In the face of this man's defense, pebbles wouldn't even cause him to stop.

……Now then, this is bad.

There was something he'd understood during this small confrontation.

"Receive my strike with brilliance."

"I refuse!"

With the mace roaring before him, he withdrew his swords and went into dodging. Even if he were to weave his way directly underneath the mace and draw close to Zeadoll, a half-baked counterattack wouldn't cause any damage.

……It's just like fire and water.

……The compatibility between this guy and me is just too bad.

"The Yuugenshu's natural enemy is you and your natural enemy is this type. The dual blades style's merits can't show through and only its demerits are exposed."

……I know that.

The merits of dual blades were its attack speed and flowing consecutive strikes. However, its range and power were inferior to great swords, axes and spears. Mounting an attack that would surpass this man's defense was difficult.

"On top of that……your mateki is repelling against the shinryoku of his Sanctuary Arts. Because the swords are infused with mateki, their cutting edge is a little dulled against a shinryoku barrier."

"It's just the worst in every possible way."

For example, the Sennenshi Leon would be able to oppose it with the great sword's destructive force.

If it was Ran who had physical strength and reflexes far above the average person, she could dive into a full-out pure martial arts battle with this man.

Or I'sa and Jin with their puppetry and dual guns, respectively, could launch a unilateral assault on this kind of enemy from afar. Of course, in that case, that was with the prerequisite difficult condition of having the destructive force to overcome the Sanctuary Arts' defense.

"I see, such great skill."

"You sure can speak!"

The mace struck from above downwards, from the right to the left and diagonally. Those all pierced through Sheltis' afterimages and smashed the stone pillars behind them.

……There's no meaning in repeated slashes.

……A stamina battle isn't a good idea either and I don 't have the time to leisurely battle in the first place.

He was keeping Yuragi waiting aboveground.

It was better if he just ignored the fight and did as Zeadoll suggested. It would be his win if he just slipped past this man's mace and broke into the Holy Hall to make it to 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye'.

Should I keep dodging and wait for this man to become impatient?

"You're waiting for a chance. That's what your expression says."

The protector with a brusque expression raised the corners of his mouth.

"I told you that my Sanctuary Arts have no openings."

The mace he swung up stopped while facing the ceiling. Coming into contact with the light raining down from above, the mace's outline shined dark grey —— that brilliance slowly grew stronger.

"My name is the 'number one' Zeadoll, or in other words, the one who has been entrusted with the weapon which surpasses a thousand bows. The secret brought about now is, in other words"

……What?

He could see the space around the mace distorting like a mirage.

Light and air were swirling around like a whirlwind.

"Strengthening the mace with the Sanctuary Arts? Sheltis, dodge it!"

Everything happened at the same time.

Zeadoll shot out the mace at the same time Sheltis turned around.

"It becomes the sole peerless holy bullet."

There was no wind or sound, only the overpowering waves of mechanical energy.

It pierced through several of the stone pillars standing in a row behind Sheltis and also destroyed the wall behind them. The grand destruction that shook the Holy Hall birthed gales and an explosion of noise and it seemed like just those two shockwaves would blow him away.

"……What ridiculous power."

Looking peripherally at the giant hole in the Holy Hall 's wall, Sheltis muttered that, dumbfounded.

"How rude of you to dodge it; you should stop it head-on."

"That's impossible."

He decisively shook his head.

……But what's this feeling?

He couldn't really find the words to describe it but there was something chilling or uncomfortable, some eerie thing that was hard to say —— that thing that he had felt during the fight with Maha couldn't be felt even after fighting this much.

This man was undoubtedly strong. But this couldn't be compared to Maha. In other words, he couldn't imagine this man as an ally of Maha's.

……Then there are Zeadoll's words from just before. It almost sounded like something.

"Fumu, well then."

"Wait."

It was a voice to stop the guardian who was pulling out the mace lodged in the rubble.

"There's something I want to ask you. You've been calling yourself the 'number one' for a while now."

"Exactly."

The guardian puffed out his chest as if to say, how good of you to ask.

"We of 'Heaven's Wheel' are a secret military organization stationed at the various centers of the Governmental Sector. We are permitted to use military force regardless of the place and we are named after the weapons entrusted to us."

"By the weapons entrusted to you……so you mean that you're the 'number one' not because you defend this place alone but because you use a single mace?"

"Yes. The 'number seven' and 'number nine' also have a fitting amount of weapons to complement their names ——……"

His words paused there.

It looks like he finally realized that he'd been lured into revealing secret information.

"I said too much; any further words are useless."

"……Well, that's fine. What I wanted to ask was something different."

He only wanted to know one thing.

The Governmental Sector had bestowed those nicknames based on numbers. But Maha who had attacked Tenketsu Sophia Palace was 'Golden'. His nickname was a color. That meant——

"So there wouldn't happen to be anybody called 'Golden' amongst your allies……right?"

"There are none."

That reply was filled with complete confidence.

"The Governmental Sector's secret military organization consists of only the 'Heaven's Wheel' comprised of the three of us. Moreover, we command an absolute place of pride so we are entrusted with centers of importance such as this Holy Hall."

"Which means you aren't deployed outside of the Governmental Sector either."

"Impossible. Our mission is "absolute holy territory", or in other words, only the elimination of intruders."

……

……So that's how it is.

Finally, finally the tangled mess had come undone. A light had pierced into the darkness-steeped confusion and he'd come to see yet another truth hidden behind it.

"See, I didn't deny that it was a place of research. That was a geological research location that became unusable so it was removed from the territorial airspace map after it was abandoned."

"On the contrary, you've come here with a demand… …recently, Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace's airships have been freely entering the floating archipelago (Lagoon) under the jurisdiction of the Governmental Sector without permission. We would like to hear an explanation for this."

Ymy said that last night while crying when she visited him.

The Governmental Sector had acknowledged the existence of the research area hidden on the flying archipelago (Lagoon) but on the other hand, they were raising suspicions of territorial intrusion by Tenketsu Palace (Sophia).

Tenketsu Palace (Sophia) was the same. They hadn't directly written any formal documents regarding it but they were currently in the midst of searching for the Governmental Sector organization that 'Golden Maha' belonged to.

——Each of the organizations is accusing each other and asserting without knowing about each other.

One of them or both of them might be lying.

……But I can't understand it no matter what.

……I can't get the impression that this man is lying.

If so——

If so, then maybe, what if both Tenketsu Palace and the Governmental Sector's assertions were right……?

"……That's right."

"Mm?"

It was a doubt that had stuck in his mind ever since he'd set foot in this Holy Hall.

"Zeadoll, I was wrong."

"You mean about your decision to infiltrate this Holy Hall?"

"No, this was planned. We were set up. We of Tenketsu Palace and you guys of the Governmental Sector."

He shook his head decisively.

"It's not Tenketsu Palace or the Governmental Sector, there's a third organization that we don't know of here."

Sophia

With that hypothesis, everything could be solved.

"……What are you saying?"

"There are guys that secretly used the research area you abandoned for a different purpose. They even cleverly prepared an airship that resembles Tenketsu Palace's."

Neither he nor Ymy believed or doubted the words of the Governmental Sector. What if the airship that had been coming and going from the floating archipelago was only an airship disguised as one of Tenketsu Palace's ?

The Governmental Sector doubted Tenketsu Palace.

Tenketsu Palace as well held suspicions about the Governmental Sector as the owners of the floating archipelago.

That's right, everything was going as somebody had planned.

"This conference is the same. At this rate, it would end with a breakdown of negotiations and the suspicions of each side having multiplied. If it goes as they planned."

"But that's wrong. Their one miscalculation was that we would meet here."

A person from each organization came into contact outside of the conference.

They didn't manage to foresee that they would talk like this at the height of battle either.

"If I didn't meet with someone like you from a secret military unit, I wouldn't have gotten information like this . I wouldn't have known about 'Heaven's Wheel' or that Maha isn't here in the Governmental Sector."

"……However, what about it?"

There was no wavering in Zeadoll's expression.

"It is the same regardless of my opponent. I simply eliminate those who infiltrate this Holy Hall. Nothing changes for you in that respect, does it?"

"That's true."

He suppressed the wry smile within him. Even if it was for learning the truth, the one who had arbitrarily intruded had been him. For Zeadoll, there was no other opponent to deal with.

"In that case,"

"That's why I'll run away."

"……What?"

Confusion settled on that steel expression for the first time. Seeing that momentary wavering, Sheltis swung his left sword close to the ground.

A squall.

The grit on the ground was stirred up and became a thick mist hanging over the Holy Hall.

"A diversion!?"

Silence answered the angry voice behind him.

Within zero visibility, Sheltis ran soundlessly towards the elevator.

Part 9

Sophia
Tenketsu Palace, floor 288.

Starlight shone into the dim hall. On the completely silent Priestess' private floor, a small girl was walking nonchalantly.

"He—y, Meimel, get up—. It's some urgent document. "

She pressed the doorbell many times with that request. But there was no response.

……It's three in the morning so she's probably still sleeping snugly.

She half-resolved herself. Ran clenched her fist to try knocking this time——

"Whaat's uup, Ran, there's still thirty minutes until the early morning training, you knoow?"

The door opened slightly and a Priestess that was rubbing her sleepy-looking eyes slowly showed her face.

Her hair was disheveled and her voice was slower than usual and lacking in majesty.

Her clothes had frills and lace and underneath that was a somewhat see-through negligee which made for a radical appearance.

"……Never show that appearance to anyone other than me. The Priestesses' dignity will be spoiled."

"It's fi—ne, it's fi—ne. So whaat is iit? An emergency contact for me?"

She looked over the document with her sleepy eyes.

With her half-downcast gaze, she read the documents without a word——

"……Heeh."

Her jade green eyes suddenly widened and her glossy lips cursed up into a crescent.

"So what was it?"

"It's from Ymy. It's long and encrypted so I'll relay it for you……umm, 'Help, Meimel! The conference with the Governmental Sector is going nowhere and I'm completely stressed out! At this rate, it doesn't look like Yuugenshu is going to become a topic at all either! Also, I had my childhood friend, Sheltis, sneak into the central division of the Governmental Sector. I just received his report upon his return……and it looks like there was an unexpected outcome which is causing a great panic!?'. It' s should be roughly like that."

"……There's a problem with how the encryption was decrypted."

She should be thankful that it had been relayed so smoothly but there was another reason for why it was hard to accept.

"It's a superlative translation, you know? So here's the rest of it……'My childhood friend says that there's a high chance that the Governmental Sector who we thought was our enemy isn't actually our enemy. There's another organization other than the Governmental Sector and we need to consider that they're maneuvering in secret, he says. I didn't believe it at first but Ilis is saying the same

thing……but then, what should I do here!?'. Okay, that's the end."

What are your thoughts on this?

Meimel looked over with those kinds of eyes, causing Ran to frown and scratch her head.

"So……as far as we've heard, they even snuck into the dangerous places in the Governmental Sector?"

"It appears so. Our spy should be with them so the possibility does exist."

"But isn't that kind of bold either way? Ymy also resolved herself well. I didn't think she had the personality."

"There's no way she would."

"……What do you mean?"

She asked without thinking.

"That's, why. There's no way she would issue such a reckless order. It was a suggestion I gave to the Cadres Guard. 'If the conference comes to a halt, use your

judgment to give Ymy a push. Even if it's a little forceful, as long as the flow changes.'"

"Ahh, so it was Ishtar who went. That innocence faker is skilled—"

The Priestess who was boring a hole in the letter with her gaze smiled.

"Ran, please send a digital document to Ymy under my name. An official document."

An official document?

That would mean the contents would be completely transparent. Even a terminal at the Governmental Sector would be able to examine it.

"It's fine, it's fine like that. The goal is to clearly convey it to the Governmental Sector under the pretense of sending it to Ymy."

Having seen through that, Meimel whispered at a lower volume.

"……Well, I thought that kind of stuff had a chance of being possible."

It was during the conversation that morning when Ymy departed for the Governmental Sector.

"Ymy, try to keep this at heart? We have no idea if the place you're about to go is dangerous or not."

"……The Governmental Sector?"

"No, not that."

"……"

"Mm, what's up, Meimel? You just went silent. Thinking about what to write??"

"Yes. Now what should I do about it, I wonder?"

Brushing her messy hair with her hand, Meimel suddenly wiped the smile from her lips.

"The contents will be one sentence. 'Today —— take care for the last day of the conference.' Well then, I'll be entrusting it to you?"

Final Chapter – Thousand Year Beast

Part 1

The edges of the sky were dyed red.

The starlight that had been tinkling in the ceiling was hidden by the sunlight and along with that, the color of the sky shifted from red to white and from white to blue.

——Finally, the sky turned azure without a cloud in it.

"It's finally sunny—. It's a day befitting the last day of the conference."

The one who said that cheerfully in the living room was a little tired of seeing that scenery.

"I think the host-san for the conference will be making a speech. That's it's been a fruitful conference."

"……I see."

"Yes. Ymy-sama, you shouldn't put on that kind of uneasy face and just do your best. We'll be able to return to Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace tomorrow."

Ishtar was carrying her long spear on her right shoulder. In response to her almost stunningly proactive words, Ymy smiled bittersweetly and nodded timidly.

"That's good but……what should I do?"

"About yesterday's report, you mean?"

This time, she silently nodded.

"*In terms of results, we have two things to report.*"

Ever since she'd heard the report from her childhood friend, it hadn't left her mind.

"*First. To start with, we didn't come into contact with 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye'.*"

"*Second. However, we fought with a guardian that belonged to a secret military organization of the Governmental Sector's ……and achieved our objective. The chances that a third organization other than Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace and the Governmental Sector is secretly maneuvering around and is behind the Yuugenshu breeding case is high.*"

At first, she'd doubted her ears.

At any rate, the conversation was making great leaps. Of course, if they were to assume the existence of a third organization, then everything would make sense but sufficient evidence would be required to back that hypothesis up. However――

"*I have the records of the conversation from then, you know ?*"

Machine Ilis crystal' sentence broke the silence.

"*The Governmental Sector's secret military organization consists of only the '*Heaven's Wheel*' comprised of the three of us. Moreover, we command an absolute place of pride so we are entrusted with centers of importance such as this Holy Hall .*"

With the testimony from the secret operative's words, the authenticity shot way up.

"Yes, that also surprised Ishtar. To think that Tenketsu Palace (Sophia) and the Governmental Sector's conference would conclude with this."

The Cadres Guard smiled wryly while combing through her hair with a hand.

"It's the evidence that the secretaries whose specialty is negotiation couldn't get—. I wonder if the guardian was the pure military type? Our side went in head-on like an idiot so it has to be someone who would respond to that spirit—"

"Yes……but that's a different matter."

The round table in the middle of the living room.

A partially-filled glass of water and a single letter to the side of it.

"Meimel wrote to be careful on the last day."

"That's a given—. After finishing this, those in charge of the Governmental Sector and the security detail will also be thinking that the first step is complete. Our General Affairs Bureau Chief also pretty much said it

yesterday. If Ishtar was planning anything, today would be the day to do it."

"Eh?"

"That's hypothetical. Rather than that, you should hurry up and eat breakfast. Wouldn't it be embarrassing if your stomach growled in the meeting room?"

"R-right!"

She trotted to the dining room where breakfast was set .

Behind her——

"Today's the last……now then, come quickly. There's no meaning to this if you don't come."

She felt like she heard a really quiet voice.

Part 2

Governmental Sector, Building Four, Area 63s break room.

"Our escorting ends today as well. It feels like it was long but short."

"……Fun, well, that's how it is."

"You didn't do anything other than sleep. I won't let you sleep today."

Kagura took up position on Vaiel's sofa and, with his seat taken, Vaiel reluctantly sat down on a chair.

And. Monica who was standing still to the side of the room's entrance lifted her head.

"It may be the last day but don't let your guard down."

"I ge—t it. This is the dangerous time, right?"

"There's that too but……"

The female unit leader was being unusually bashful with a meek face.

"It's our first mission. Rather than that nothing happened, I want to return to Tenketsu Sophia Palace and proudly report that 'we accomplished it'."

"Roger that. These kinds of things are what's cute about you, Monica."

"Wha……Ka-Kagura! I'm saying this seriously, you know?"

She folded her arms in embarrassment then pulled up a chair somewhat roughly. Looking sidelong at those three, Sheltis let out a sigh that they wouldn't notice.

——I'm glad.

Infiltrating the Governmental Sector's central division and fighting the Holy Hall's guardian.

He had been prepared for the inevitable ruckus today but the Governmental Sector's office building was calm. It didn't look like they were going to put an emergency halt to the conference to search for an intruder either.

"*Zeadoll, huh. There was a danger that he would come aboveground.*"

If he was seen together with Monica and the others, it would be obvious at a glance that he was also a Guard of Tenketsu Palace. He'd also prepared for that worst-case scenario but……

"*It's like he said yesterday. He only focuses on guarding the Holy Hall.*"

It didn't matter who the intruder was. If he appears again, this time for sure —— he was undoubtedly waiting with that kind of vigor.

"*Now then, will you be able to let loose for today?*"

"No way, there's a mountain of things to think about."

The third organization.

He couldn't imagine how many people there were or what they were like. At any rate, they were secretly operating in the shadows of Tenketsu Palace and the Governmental Sector so they must be a really troublesome opponent.

"I wonder if there's a way. A way to settle this all cleanly."

"Mm?"

"Ahh, it's nothing, just talking to myself."

Having heard it with his sharp ears, Vaiel asked him to repeat himself and Sheltis frantically shook his head.

Governmental Sector, Building Two, Area 61s waiting room.

"Yuragi-chan, you have circles again〜"

"Ah……you noticed?"

Having it pointed out by Ishtar, Yuragi pushed up her glasses with the bridge.

"Noticing or whatever, you didn't try to hide it. You have the same amount of make-up on as usual. Does this mean you didn't have enough time to hide it with make-up?"

"Yes."

She nodded while curling her bangs around a finger.

"I took care of things after what happened last night. Lots of things happened on that end."

"Fuun. But nothing conclusive was left behind, right?"

At that question, Yuragi wordlessly held up her card key.

She had lent it to Sheltis last night but the problem was that this card key had released the hidden elevator that led to the Holy Hall. If they checked the access logs for the elevator, it would be readily apparent whose card key had infiltrated the Holy Hall. Suspicion would fall upon her first and foremost.

……Though I was prepared for that from the beginning.

"I was taking care of this."

"Ah, I see. 'Entering' wasn't a problem but it was bad for Yuragi-chan."

It looked like she'd understood with just that as Ishtar smacked fist on her open palm.

"Please keep it a secret from Sheltis-sama."

"Why?"

"His job is as an escort and taking care of the complicated matters is my role."

"……Yuragi-chan's really passionate about her job."

With her eyes widened, Ishtar sighed a breath of admiration.

"Ara, Ishtar-sama is the same, no? I heard about it from Ymy-sama. You haven't taken a real break these four days and have been getting by with simple preserved foods for meals."

"No, no, that's different. What Ishtar's doing isn't job. It's specially for this time."

"Specially……is it?"

"It's a personal grudge. I came here because I wanted a **very personal distraction**."

With a full smile.

The Cadres Guard declared that looking like she was so happy she couldn't stand it.

Govermental Sector, Building Two, Area 63s '*Yuumei Space*'. [19]

A chandelier with different colored gems hung from the ceiling. The carpet underfoot was a deep crimson that almost looked as if it was smoldering. Within the extremely spacious room were two very long desks with chairs lined up along them. Both of them were very dignified antiques. She'd also received an explanation saying that the large hall could be used for plays.

……Yuumei. Does that mean light and dark?

……Is holding the conference in this room also to clearly convey that?

"_____"

Remembering the name of the large hall, Ymy's eyes that were hidden from view lowered.

She had been terrified of when the topic of Sheltis intruding upon the Holy Hall was going to come up, but there didn't seem to be any of that kind of harsh atmosphere.

……That's a relief.

……But the essential conference hasn't gotten anywhere.

Still, even Ymy didn't think today's conference would solve anything.

If the Yuugenshu breeding at the floating archipelago (Lagoon) wasn't connected to the Governmental Sector, then it'd be fine to make a compromise from Tenketsu Palace's (Sophia) side. It might become necessary to cooperate with the Governmental Sector to combat the third organization in Sheltis' information. Then she just had to pray for a safe ending to the conference for the time being. Rather than a development, she hoped that there would be no new dispute.

"_____"

The topic of the third organization could not be outed yet.

Because it was the testimony of Sheltis, Ymy wanted to believe in it, but it was still too flimsy from her position as a Priestess. Just the testimony of a single Cadet Guard and the vocal recording from machine crystal (Ilis) was not enough. For Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace to release information officially, they would have to perform a proper investigation.

……Ahh, how irritating.

……Even though I want to make the information public and get the Governmental Sector's assistance in investigating the third organization.

In the middle of her seat in the large hall, Ymy sighed unbeknownst to the others.

Then.

Part 3

At around the same time.

"*Everything's as planned. Maha-san will attack the conference in Building Two. In the meantime, I will target '* Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' in the hidden passage in Building Four.*"

"……"

"*The method of attack? Well, I don't mind if you disregard the details and just crash in through the front.*"

"I see. Then I'll start."

Somewhere within the Governmental Sector, an unusual event abruptly began.

Part 4

"Do you like that poem collection?"

"That's not it, I just brought it to kill time."

Vaiel averted his face.

……It looks like his taste in books contrasts with his appearance.

Stealing glances at him reading the thick poetry collection, Kagura smiled wryly without him noticing.

"I'll step out for a bit. I want to drink some coffee to keep myself awake."

"Kagura, you still haven't fixed your nocturnal lifestyle?"

"It's been a routine for some years now after all. Before noon like this is the peak of my sleepiness. I'll somehow make it to night if I manage to pull through this."

She lightly shook her head and held fast to her consciousness.

"Are you three okay with coffee?"

"Ah, Kagura for me――"

"Remember the milk, right? I know Monica's usual."

She went towards the far side door while holding machine pearl. Ahead of the vast hall lay the intersection that split into a labyrinth.

"……If I remember, there should be a vending machine in the lobby."

With machine pearl ahead of her, she left the room. She at times made a turn at an intersection and sometimes went straight down a passage, taking the shortest route to the lobby. Just before she turned the last corner.

Clatter.

With a mechanical sound, all the ceiling lights went bright red.

"*Warning: The Administrative Department is declaring a state of emergency in Building Two.*

I repeat. The Administrative Department has declared a state of emergency in Building Two."

"!?"

She stopped and turned around without thinking.

A building-wide warning? That and these red lights are anything but normal. It's on the level of emergency training or having a great number of Yuugenshu attacking this floating Lagoon archipelago.

"No way, could it really be Yuugenshu!?"

The Governmental Sector workers around her as well didn't know the situation and had stopped. The meeting room's door in the distance opened and the staff that had been conducting the meeting also stepped out into the passage.

"*Intrusion from the front gate. The intruder has passed the gate's security and is currently closing in on Building Two.*"

……An intruder?

……They passed through the Governmental Sector's front gate with force?

The security personnel, guards and automated mechanical weapons should have been deployed there. Special units for combating Yuugenshu shouldn't have been lacking in numbers either.

"Jeez, what's happening!"

Machine (Machina) pearl started moving again and she ran after it. She sprinted at full speed down the straight path and ran into the lobby packed with people.

At the end of this hall, Kagura saw something dreadful .

The glass door at the other end of the hall.

The two intruders approaching from the other side of the glass.

Black and Gold.

A man wearing a suit and pitch black hat which was pulled low over his eyes.

And the ominous spell caster in an ocher robe who was even larger than that man.

"……Ah……"

Her throat went dry and not even a scream came out.

……No……You're kidding……It can't be.

She didn't know the Black one. However, she had seen the other spell caster before. She hadn't forgotten, couldn't forget. The spell caster that had wiped out consecutive units from Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace by himself.

"**My Golden Hexehedral is invincible.**"

The spell caster swung up his right hand.

The ground —— the brown asphalt swelled up and created an avalanche of rocks pretty much like a tsunami. The armored vehicles and specially armored weapons surrounding the intruders as well as the guards were all swept away by the avalanche to a distant location.

In just dozens of seconds, the entire defense force outside Building Two went silent.

……It's the real one……these overpowering spells.

……There's no way it's a fake……

'*Golden*' Maha.

The opponent that she and Sheltis had once repelled in a life or death battle. But why was he attacking the Governmental Sector? It was believed without a doubt that he was an assassin of the Governmental Sector's that time he had wiped out Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace's units.

……Then Maha isn't a part of Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace or the Governmental Sector?

He's part of a completely different group?

"……Igun-I."

"Yes, yes."

The pitch black man answered Maha's mutter with a smile.

……Igun-I? That's the other one's name?

Kagura's ears which were longer than a human's ears picked up a little of that conversation.

The enemy was outside and she was in the lobby. They shouldn't be aware of her existence so they wouldn't consider being overheard.

"Well then, Maha-san, we'll meet at the arranged location."

Pulling the hat far enough to hide his eyes, Igun-I bowed. Like that, he turned his back on his companion, Maha, and headed off in the direction of Building Four.

Is it a two-pronged attack? No, right now, there's something more important than that.

"……"

She could feel cold sweat upon her cheek under the machine helmet.

I can't stop it myself. No, all the guards in the Governmental Sector can't stop these monsters. Only one person can do it.

……I have to tell him.

……I have to tell Sheltis.

Kagura ran to the break room that the dual sword-wielding boy was waiting.

Part 5

"Wha……what……is……this!?"

In response to the sudden announcement and red lamp lighting.

There had been nothing like this since she'd snuck into the Governmental Sector. Nothing had happened when she'd escorted Sheltis and intruded on the Holy Hall either.

……And what's this rumbling?

"The building……just the building is shaking?"

Holding herself flat against the wall, Yuragi somehow managed to stay upright.

The tremors that seemed like they'd turn the ground inside out appeared to be getting larger and growing closer. This wasn't an earthquake. It was a tremor like some giant lifeforms had banded together and were coming to them.

A giant lifeform, so possibly Yuugenshu?"

"No……this isn't a joke……this is the interior of the building, you know!?"

They shouldn't be able to advance without getting lost with the labyrinthine structure. It would be impossible for them to advance without being artificially guided.

"……What's……going on……here?"

With a hand to the wall, she stepped her way to the door. She timidly reached out a hand to the doorknob. Something might be waiting on the other side. Resolving herself, she swung open the door with all her strength.

At the same time——

A giant lion's claws and fangs tore through everything in sight.

……Eh?

A lion. But I've never seen a bright red lion like this before. ……No way. Dangerous animals infiltrated this building and are attacking. That's ludicrous.

Impossi————

"O〜kay, just stay still like that!"

Before her brain could process the voice that came from directly behind her, a white blade cut through the gap between her and the lion.

……All she managed to see was a momentary flash.

"Ah〜, it's fine now. I cleaned it up."

Ishtar rested the spear's handle on her shoulder.

Just like she said, the lion had come to a sudden stop without a twitch. Without understanding what had been

done —— the beast's body crumbled into a lump of earth . With that, she finally understood that the flash from before had been a slash.

"Heeh, a red manticore, and it looks just like the real thing. Though it'd be the same even if it were real."

She whistled with an expression of admiration.

"Yuragi-chan, hide here. Ishtar will meet with the enemy and come back."

"E-enemy!?"

The Governmental Sector's assailant. Then the broadcast from before was also real?

"Lock the door. Also, don't make a sound. Isn't it nice that you can nap now and nobody will find out? You were lacking sleep, right?"

"……"

"Mm? What's wrong?"

"……Pardon me, but you seem somehow happy."

"I am happy."

With a smile.

The Cadres Guard nodded with a smile like she was about to meet with family.

"Yup, I'm happy. The happiest. **Ishtar's waited for this for a long time**."

Part 6

The endlessly sounding warning.

The evacuation guidance broadcast played loudly however many times and the bright red lights on the ceiling were shining brilliantly. There was also a thunderous sound like the ground was rumbling.

"Oi, oi, what's this?"

"……An intruder?"

Vaiel's angry voice and Monica's mutter.

"*Keep the pondering for later. Sheltis, your swords.*"

Machine Ilis crystal lit up in dazzling crimson. The dual swords in his hands had vivid deep purple blades constructed upon their hilts.

"Monica, hurry!"

"Y-yeah. Okay —— I'm opening it."

The unit leader had her crossed Rosario rods in hand as she kicked open the door with vigor.

The bright red lighting fell upon those of the Governmental Sector running about trying to escape. That even included the parliamentary members that had been at the conference.

"Even the conference participants!? Then what about the conference……what about Ymy!?"

Monica raised her voice with a pale face.

"*Sheltis, hurry to the meeting room!*"

Got it —— with a nod, Sheltis turned towards the intersection. There were the sounds of the footsteps of a great many people.

"……This way. Hurry!"

Off-gold hair shone brightly.

With the girl in pure white vestments in the lead, the General Affairs Bureau Chief came next followed by his secretaries.

"Ymy!"

"Sheltis?……That's great, there was a broadcast telling everybody to escape."

Her shoulders moving with her breaths, the Priestess' expression softened.

"General Affairs Bureau Chief, are any of you injured?"

"We have no impediments. But what's the meaning of this uproar———"

"Sheltis!"

A shout cut off the General Affairs Bureau Chief's words.

From the right-hand side of the intersection, the opposite of where Ymy's group appeared, a small shadow was running towards them.

"Kagura!? I'm glad. I wondered what happened to you ."

"Mo……Monica……it's……dangerous here. ……We need to……a wider place."

With intermittent breaths and gasping, Kagura forced the words out.

"It's him……Sheltis……that monster———"

"**Zazakazada……da……zakarakara…… zadadadazakakakazadazakazada……rada…… rakazazakakadada……za……zaza……karakara…… zadadadada……**"

A noise-like aria that resembled the sound of a bug's wings.

Sheltis understood everything the instant he heard that . Having understood everything ——— he understood just exactly how dangerous this situation was.

"Monica, I leave Ymy to you!"

He sprinted to the intersection without waiting for an answer.

He brandished his sword at the Golden spell caster that calmly appeared there. The spell caster shifted over the instant before the edge of his sword made contact.

"!?"

Spinning his body like a screw, he crossed his blades and the right arm that was shining gold came thrusting up. He took that with his left sword and —— he couldn't mitigate it and was blasted up high into the air.

……This guy.

……It's not the real Maha but just his automated puppet, huh!

Maha's clone that was created in his image using gold. The last they'd met, it was the final spell that Maha had shown. Now it's the opening move?

"*Sheltis, there's another one to the rear!*"

"——Kuu!"

At machine Ilis crystal' warning, he thrust out his blade before spinning around.

He repelled the fist of the second clone that seemed to have calculated where he'd land and kicked off its shoulder to open up some distance.

……Not just one but two. No.

Countless footsteps approached from further down the passage. There's no way all these footsteps could be……

"My Golden Hexehedral is invincible."

Then.

At least ten spell casters, dressed in golden robes and shining gold themselves, appeared. ……So he prepared a large number of clones beforehand for this attack.

The Governmental Sector's security was wiped out cleanly by this.

……This is a sudden predicament.

It would take all his strength just to fight the real Maha . With this number of clones, not to mention if they made something, it would be unmanageable.

"Be crushed."

Under Maha's orders, the clones pushed nearer.

"Monica, take everyone and head to the meeting room! "

"I-idiot! What kind of——"

Before her answer, he lunged at the clones that were closing in from both directions.

The clones that were giving off a golden shine. They swung their fists at a speed invisible to the eye and he

read their paths from the shoulder alone and dodged. He didn't retreat backwards or jump to the side and passed through the countless clones' fists ——— drawing nearer to Maha's real body.

"Define."

A crack opened up at Maha's feet. The material coating the floor fragmented and the earth underneath that jetted out. That formed into the image of wriggling snakes.

"Extracting poisonous materials within the ground and performing pseudo-creation. The color is '*white*', nature is '*cowardly*', form is '*snake*'. Ten shall appear, fangs laden in deadly poison. Defined to seal the enemy before me with poison."

White snakes with deadly poison appeared as Maha's advance guard.

……But I already saw this in our last battle.

Those defined with the '*cowardly*' nature would only attack an unmoving opponent.

"**——Forcefully dispelling the previous definition.**"

The stiffened white snakes at Maha's feet raised their heads at his voice.

"It's a trap; Sheltis, dodge!"

Kagura shouted. At the same time, poisonous beasts filled his vision.

To dodge the enemies coming from above and below in every which direction, he jumped up to just beneath the ceiling. Kicking off the ceiling, he moved to a wall and then he kicked off that to land on the ground further to the rear.

At that instant.

His vision blurred momentarily from an intense impact and a violent pain ran through his left shoulder.

"……Kaa……?"

His diaphragm convulsed from the shock transmitted through his left shoulder and his breathing stopped.

……Maha's……clone!

A single clone had circled around behind him when he landed. It had aimed for the point when he was completely defenseless. He clenched his molars at that failure as and Maha's clones approached from all directions.

"Sheltis!"

The scream of his childhood friend echoed from behind.

……What to do.

With one arm numbed, the enemy's fists were approaching from all directions. He couldn't react to them all. With that in mind, he still poured power into the grip on his right sword——

Carve my name which is synonymous with great reverence and majesty

Otoga Wem millmo, HIr shoul da ora peg ilmeri giris ende zorm

All of Maha's clones that were drawing near were blown away.

"……Eh."

"*This is*——"

Underneath the red lighting, a single pearl-colored precious spear was shining.

It was a super speed slash tranquil enough to not even stir up a single grain of dust but fast enough to leave behind a whirlwind.

Resisting or reacting were not permitted. Maha's clones which were disappearing into the walls were cut perfectly in two in succession and returned to gold dust.

Everyone who was watching couldn't move and even Maha stopped for a moment.

In the middle of that——

"O—kay! Sorry to keep you waiting, Ymy-sama, it's Ishtar〜!"

Placing the handle of her spear against her right shoulder, only the Cadres Guard was standing there smiling.

"Gosh, jeez. When I went to the meeting room, nobody was there. It's troubling for me if you just evacuate on your own, Ymy-sama; you have to wait until I come to you, you know?"

"Ah……s-sorry."

"It's fine—, it looks like I made it in time so everything 's fine! Now then——"

Giggle.

With a challenging look on her face, Ishtar turned to Maha who was standing still after having his clones thoroughly crushed.

"Ishtar will face this guy. Monica-san, your unit should evacuate with Ymy-sama and the General Affairs Bureau Chief's group to the meeting room."

"Un……Understood!"

"Good answer. Now, let's quickly——"

"W-wait, please!"

Kagura's shout stopped the Cadres Guard who was about to move.

"This is a diversion! Using the opening caused by Maha rampaging here, another man named Igun-I is aiming for something in Building Four!"

"……Heeh."

Hyuu, the Cadres Guard instead whistled happily.

"Hey, is that true?"

"……You're slow."

Beneath the shadow cast by his hood, Maha's lips opened slightly.

"Igun-I has……already headed there. Everything in existence is under our control."

The spell caster's left hand was raised very high.

"Be purged by heavy pressure, tremble and sink, ground——"

"Who's the slow one?"

Ishtar's spear danced and Maha's words as well as the ceiling were cut off. [20]

Crish —— the ceiling was cracked into what resembled a spiderweb. That became countless fragments of varying size and that great mass of rubble and dust swallowed Maha and his clones. This wasn't an opponent that would be silenced with just that but it would probably take him some time to get out of it.

"Now then, isn't it your turn?"

Ishtar's gaze fell onto Sheltis who was still pressing on his left shoulder.

"You know what these guys are aiming for."

"……The eye?"

Now that they knew about the third organization, using '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' to investigate them was also possible. That meant that the people in question would absolutely want to get rid of that treasure, the '*Crimson Eye*'.

"That's right. Unfortunately, you're the only one who knows where that's located. So go. This guy's Ishtar's prey anyway. I'll also protect the Priestess-sama for you. "

"……But"

Her opponent was Golden Maha. To fight this monster alone and guard a Priestess at the same time, he knew best just how harsh that was. Rather than the Governmental Sector's treasure or anything else, right now he should completely assure Ymy's safety——

"**That's why, boy, why don't you try asking through force?**"

……

……**That line is**……

"Don't tell me you forgot?"

It was a quiet and heavy tone that seemed to pierce into his heart like a blade. Even so, her face was filled with a provocative smile like one shown to a long-time old friend.

"If you're chasing after the Sennenshi (Leon) who's gone on ahead, boy, then you can't remain here. **The one who will remain here is me**. I wonder if you remember me saying it that day?"

"I told you, the goals that you and I pursue are different. They're completely different."

"I've achieved mine! It's enough if I have the position of an Elite Guard."

——There's no way I could forget.

——It was the last conversation she and I exchanged before I fell to the Garden of Corrupted Song (Eden), after all.

She continued to make her spear let out a shrill sound like a whistle.

"I'm saying to go. Or are you uneasy if it's me?"

"……"

"You're the one who said you'd become a Sennenshi. If your resolve that day was not a lie, then go."

Being hit with that stabbing smile, Sheltis slowly let out a breath.

……How stupid.

……Then I really was found out right when we met.

"That's why I don't like you; just when you're playing innocent, you suddenly reveal your true colors."

"Playing innocent is unthinkable. Right, Priestess-sama?"

Ishtar turned around with a coercive smile. But there wasn't a single person who could reply to that.

Ymy, the General Affairs Bureau Chief and his fellow Cadet Guards couldn't say anything about the Cadres Guard's true nature.

Filled with fighting spirit and confidence, she stood in a way that only showed some kind of sublimity.

……Ymy.

Sheltis lightly nodded at his childhood friend who was peeking out from behind Monica.

"……I leave the Priestess in your care."

"Leave her to me."

The rocks that swallowed up Maha swelled.

"Go!"

"*I'll guide you through the shortest route to Building Four, Area 31.*"

Being pushed on by Ishtar's bellow, Sheltis stepped forward.

Part 7

"……There's a gap between your strength and your growth. Such terrible growth."

The boy who had disappeared further into the passage . Looking at him go, Ishtar let out a rare bitter sigh.

"Unit Leader Monica."

"Y-yes!"

"It's as you heard. I'll face this guy. You take the Priestess-sama and the General Affairs Bureau Chief's entourage to the meeting room. I'll leave the details after that up to you. ……Now then."

Maha stood up unwounded despite the gigantic rubble .

"This guy's spells are numerous and annoying. I'll ignore a moderate amount so take care of the puppets that went that way. Can you do it?"

"U-Understood!"

The Cadet Guards behind her escorted the Priestess. Feeling them walking away behind her, Ishtar once again leered at the practitioner in front of her.

"Now we can finally talk, just the two of us. I've been waiting for this. ———At any rate, it looks like you took care of my younger sister."

"……"

"That's right……I've waited a long time. Taking on this annoying mission and everything is because I bet on the chance that you might appear. Be a little thankful?"

The Golden spell caster stayed silent. Perhaps in his place, the poisonous snakes crawling around his feet slowly raised their heads.

……That's right, that was what started this.

"*Onee-sama……onee-sama, I'm sorry……I……*"

It started with I'sa who used to cry for reasons Ishtar couldn't understand no matter how many times she asked.

She had a weak bodily constitution and couldn't even go to school much. The one who looked after her troubles in that household which consisted of only the sisters and no parents was always Ishtar.

In place of a mother, she nursed her, made meals and attended to I'sa without sleep.

In place of a father, she taught her studies, taught her how to exercise and protected I'sa from the surrounding dangers.

At those times, her sister always cried.

She cried and apologized.

"*Onee-sama……onee-sama, I'm sorry……I……*"

In reality, her older sister could be more accomplished in studies and fitness than anybody and wouldn't lose to any of her peers. It couldn't be helped that she felt frustrated that her older sister was sacrificing her talents on her.

"I'sa-chan is an idiot. Onee-chan's fine like this."

"But……but, but……!"

Then she cried again.

She thought of her as a really kind little sister. That was also why she wanted to be by her little sister's side.

——Until my sister becomes able to fly by her own strength, I will protect her.

She learned spear techniques to protect her little sister and became a Guard at Tenketsu Palace in order to become even faster and stronger. It wasn't to protect the Priestesses at the top but to protect her little sister who slept at their house.

Sophia

——Because isn't it a given?

——The Priestesses have many people protecting them but I'm the only one protecting my sister.

When she came to notice it, Ishtar had become a spear warrior that wouldn't lose to anyone around her. It wouldn't be strange if she became a Sennenshi at any time. It was to the point that it was an open rumor.

"*Onee-sama, you won't be a Sennenshi?*"

"*Yu～p. Onee-chan's bad at that kind of thing.*"

She hadn't even honestly told I'sa that reason.

If she became a Sennenshi, her time would be taken up guarding the Priestess. Her training time would decrease and most importantly, she would have to live apart from her younger sister who was the one she wished to protect the most.

"*Hey, Sheltis-kun, do you want to become a Sennenshi?*"

"*I'm fine with being an Elite Guard. I have no interest in being a Sennenshi.*"

That was why she always gave up the position of Sennenshi.

On the other hand, ironically, I'sa whom she should have been protecting was now completely healthy and, taking after her, even started saying that she wanted to be a Guard.

……Well, fine, if that's what I'sa-chan wants to do.

It was a little complicated as her older sister but Ishtar permitted it.

It looked like she had talent as a shinryoku user and she'd found a reliable dual guns user so Ishtar had had the intention of watching over her as her older sister.

That continued for several years and just when she thought it would keep going well like that.

Information that a Regular Guard unit was wiped out by an unknown person arrived.

"I'sa-chan, are you okay!?"

"Onee-sama……"

What Ishtar saw in the medical ward was her little sister with her eyes swollen bright red.

In the hospital.

Her little sister cried while looking at her.

Ishtar was reminded of how long it had been since she'd seen that. The weakened form of her sister that she thought she wouldn't see anymore. The true nature of her little sister.

"……Onee-sama……onee-sama, I'm sorry……I……"

"You don't have to say it. You don't need to worry."

"……Onee-sama?"

Ishtar held her sobbing little sister tight to her chest.

That was also something that hadn't happened in years.

"I'sa-chan is fine. ……If you're unharmed, it means you were able to return **here**. Leave the rest to onee-chan."

That's right, that was the start.

The one who had attacked her I'sa had already been defeated once but that was a puppet created by the spell caster. Then this time, she would——

Part 8

Governmental Sector, Building Four, Area 19.

"*Turn left at the next corner.*"

He focused on nothing but running down the corridor illuminated by the bright red lights.

There was nobody in the corridor and he'd seen the meeting room's door wide open so a warning must have been issued here in Building Four as well.

The walls and ceiling had crumbled.

The floor was cracked and earth was scattered about.

"There is evidence that a few of Maha's clones also infiltrated this building. Don't let down your guard."

He didn't reply to that.

"……Ilis, how long will it take you to undo the lock on that elevator?"

They didn't have Yuragi's card key which they'd used to get on the elevator that led to the Holy Hall last night. He could only rely on machine crystal Ilis using Yuragi's card key's information to forcefully dispel the lock.

"Five, no, four minutes."

"Two minutes."

"……Make sure to praise me if I succeed, okay?"

Her crystal portion blinked as if she were smiling wryly.

"Make a left there."

Pushing forward through a passage he remembered, the steel door illuminated by an emergency light came into view.

"Ilis, start with unlocking this."

"*No……wait, this is……?*"

"*Sheltis, try opening the door as it is. It might already be unlocked.*"

The door released with an aged sound. Ahead of that, illuminated by the emergency lighting, was the exact same thing as last night.

"*The elevator should also be working. There are signs that somebody other than me has already forcefully unlocked the door.*"

"……So it's the guy that Maha called Igun-I."

It was possible that there was somebody else in charge of the hacking but they had no way of knowing that. At any rate, it was a stroke of luck amongst the bad.

"Let's go, Ilis."

……Ishtar.

……I can't be like you.

He hadn't noticed that twilight.

A four year period. The difficulty of continuing to stand in that place all by herself without advancing or retreating even as those around her were promoted or when she left the tower. The harshness.

He was different from Ishtar. He couldn't copy how she lived.

……That's why I need to continue on.

Part 9

Governmental Sector, Building Two, Area 63s 'Yuumei Space'.

In the large hall with the warning still blaring, the sound of metal scraping upon metal continued to echo.

"——Guu!"

She intercepted the descending golden arm with her crossed rods. (Rosario)

The impact ran through her arm's bone and echoed in her shoulder. But she didn't lower the strength put into her crossed rods. (Rosario) She trapped the wrist between her two crossed rods (Rosario) and sealed its movements.

"Vaiel!"

"I…..got it, this damn crafted thing!"

His fists equipped with the iron fist protectors (Knuckle Dusters) stabbed into the enemy's now-defenseless back. Maha's clone fell over with a violent shake. Aiming for the moment when it staggered, Monica threw aside the crossed rods (Rosario) and ran up to it.

A golden light wrapped her bare hand. Shinryoku of the same color as Maha's advent style arts enveloped her body.

"Crumble."

She touched the clone with her fingertip.

In that instant, Maha's clone stopped moving —— and returned to gold dust with a crumbling sound.

"What trick is that?"

"I just distorted the shinryoku wavelength. It's the same kind as jamming somebody's clairvoyance……the explanation's pretty long so the short version is that it can beat a clone like that."

Rosario

Picking up the crossed rods that were on the ground, Vaiel threw them over to her. Catching them with both hands, Monica once again looked up at the higher floor.

"But it looks like I already don't have the leisure of using it."

The door on the highest floor creaked and opened. Maha's clones stood in a row. Behind them were red manticores and beyond those were small dragon-types.

"I didn't want to say it but is that Cadres Guard really fighting? Are you sure she didn't lose or something?"

"No."

Accompanied by the luminescence of the machine pearl (Machina), Kagura took a step forward.

"That spell caster's strength isn't of this level. This is probably ten or twenty percent with the greater portion being forced to remain with the real Maha."

"……Both are inhuman, huh."

Holding back a wry smile from leaking out, Monica started walking forward again.

The members who can fight in this large hall are just these three. Ishtar dispatched Sheltis to the Governmental Sector so it'll come down to a life or death struggle without our two strongest fighting forces.

"Monica-senpai!"

That voice came from behind her.

"I……I can help too!"

"You can't, stay there."

She stopped the Priestess who was running over.

"Our mission is to protect you. What will we do if the Priestess who we should be protecting comes to the frontlines?"

……Ymy.

"B-but! If I provide support, then fighting――"

"I know……but no. I can't put you in danger."

Part 10

"*Sheltis!*"

At the same time the elevator arrived at the Holy Hall.

Sheltis hurriedly jumped aside of the light that filled his vision.

"……They're also in combat here."

A four-legged medium-sized dragon staggered after receiving a single blow to the head. It received a follow-up attack before it could get up and returned to the gigantic boulder that comprised it.

——Zeadoll.

The guardian of the Holy Hall who swung a mace. He had no idea how long the battle had been going on for but it didn't seem to have been short. Nevertheless, he had zero injuries. He felt that maybe it was par for the course to say that it was expected that he didn't even show exhaustion.

However, the enemy force made up of Maha's creations wasn't stopping.

Poisonous snakes came from blind spots below, monstrous birds created thunderous noises above and on top of all that, Maha's clones were attacking from every which direction.

……Zeadoll hasn't noticed me.

He could easily break through to the Holy Hall's interior right now. But——

"……*Sheltis?*"

"We're taking a detour."

Holding his swords, Sheltis sprinted towards Zeadoll.

"Mu, you are……!"

The guardian sensed his presence and turned around. He didn't answer him and swung his swords —— he cut down the poisonous snakes closing in from behind Zeadoll and smacked a single poisonous snake up towards a monstrous bird circling around overhead.

The bomb in the shape of a bird reacted to the impact and caused a huge explosion.

The flames and force of that explosion caused another bird to explode. The enemy's forces were wrapped up in the chain explosions. Maha's clones returned to gold dust and the poisonous white snakes returned to dirty mud.

The explosions stopped.

The ones standing there were only Sheltis and the guardian.

"……What are you doing?"

The man narrowed his eyes and looked over.

"Should I not have helped?"

"Wrong. I was asking why an intruder like yourself provided assistance."

"I'm not an enemy."

He returned the overpowering gaze head-on.

"I said this yesterday but we probably have a common enemy who's been tricking us. They should be aiming for '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*'. If you use the '*Crimson Eye*', you can discover their identity, right? They should be afraid of that."

"……"

"……I'll fight you later if you want. At any rate, we have to protect the '*Crimson Eye*'."

Finally.

With an expression of resignation, Zeadoll slowly lowered his mace.

"I will consider your punishment later. Protecting the '*Eye*' is my foremost priority right now as well."

Come along.

His massive back seemed to be saying that as he ran off without an answer.

“Some time ago, a completely black man took those along and came here. ……No. The only one who came down the elevator was that man and those enemy forces suddenly appeared around him.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t understand how. But while I was dealing with those forces, that man leisurely infiltrated the Holy Room . It is the greatest failure in my life.”

The guardian’s voice shook with indignation.

They ran at full speed to the north of the gigantic Holy Hall. After countless stone pillars flashed by to the side, they arrived at a mechanical door.

“It’s inside here.”

Giiii……with a strange creaking sound, the door parted to the sides.

It was a room filled with every radiance.

Red, blue, green, yellow, white. The grand room arrangement was blessed with fight vivid colors of light. In the middle was an egg-shaped giant crimson crystal. The width was several metres. Its height was close to ten metres. Even if Sheltis looked up, he couldn't see the top.

"This is '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*'?……It's almost like it's alive."

The interior of the crystal was repeatedly flashing like the beating of a heart. It was like the precursor to something being born.

"I've waited a long……long time."

A black shadow appeared at the summit of the crystal.

"Sheltis, I've wanted to meet you for a long time."

A pitch black boot and pitch black shoes with a pitch black rimmed hat.

Amidst all the black, the pale blond hair swaying beneath the hat stood out as odd. [21]

……This man is Igun-I?

……What is……this feeling……

The one looking up and the one looking down. Even with this much distance between them, he was suddenly assaulted by a bizarre intoxicated sense that he was locking eyes with them as though they were right in front of him. It was almost like he was meeting with a longtime friend after a long time.

"……I'm happy."

Igun-I didn't even try to hide his smile. [22]

"You know me. Ahh, that's great. I'm really happy."

"I……don't know you."

He suppressed the throbbing of his chest and glared at the opponent above.

That's right, I shouldn't know him.

But what is this ——— my chest is stirring ——— it's feels like deja vu.

"That's fine. It's fine if you don't know. It's fine if you feel it even if you don't know. Hey, Sheltis, '*Nice to meet you*.' and '*It's been a while.*'. I've been eagerly waiting the time we would meet in this world."

……What does that mean?

It's a certainty that this man is an ally of Maha. But even if he heard about me from Maha, his words are too deep. And why is he so friendly?

"Ahh, I can't. I was so happy, I almost forgot my job."

With the words Igun-I spilled, Sheltis finally reconfirmed the current situation.

That's right, this man's objective is——

"You……! I don't know who you are but that's the Governmental Sector's treasure. Entering this Holy Hall without permission is one thing, but who are you to step on the '*Crimson Eye*'!"

With a thunderous sound, he struck the ground beneath him with the mace.

"If so, then immediately——"

"You're wrong."

"What?"

Zeadoll's expression changed with the unexpected response.

"This isn't the Governmental Sector's property. A single person……this is something an engineer created a thousand years ago. The Governmental Sector just happened to scavenge it. Though saying that to you will probably have no effect. Right, Sheltis?"

With his hand firmly on the rimmed hat, Igun-I was constantly looking over at him.

"Do you want to know; you do, right? What this crystal is."

"You……would tell an enemy that?"

"If you so wish."

It was an eerie smile completely devoid of hostility.

"So I'll tell you. This crystal is the product of humanity 's failed attempt at artificially creating '*a certain existence*', a shadow of its former self, so to speak. ……You should know the original. It's the existence known as the '***Forbidden Crystal***'."

The floating archipelago (Lagoon) that he'd accompanied Leon to.

At the hidden research facility, the girl that had been displayed on the screen set up in front of the Yuugenshu.

……Shel……tis.

……Is that you……looking at me?

……The one looking……at the frozen dream of the Garden of Corrupted Song (Eden)……at the Forbidden Crystal.

Why would that name appear here?

"……What do you mean?"

"I'm glad that I've aroused your interest. It had the intended effect. But——"

Igun-I smiled.

"It doesn't look like you're trying to get the '*Crimson Eye*' through force. ……Well, I tampered with the contents a bit so I'll just leave it alone and run away."

"……Run away?"

"If you want to know, chase after me. Now, Sheltis, chase after me. That is the beginning of everything. …… However, that's for until after you've played with these."

Igun-I raised both hands to the ceiling.

Like a music conductor.

Awaken now, all you forgotten children

Li Xea = F shela, elmei/ x-delis tis, Selah pheno sia-s Orbie Eden

Beneath Igun-I, the crimson crystal began changing color.

From crimson to red, red to blue, blue to green. After that, gold and white. Then at the end —— the crystal became half-transparent like frosted glass.

……What is that?

Something was squirming inside the half-transparent crystal. There were two of them. One was black and inorganic. The other was deep purple and had a hazy outline——

"This is from a thousand years ago……!?"

As if in response to the shout from machine Ilis crystal, the front of the crystal distorted like a heat haze and the two gigantic monsters alighted from it.

A massive mechanical weapon equipped with pitch black armor.

The other one was a four-legged beast whose entire body emitted a deep purple cursed mist.

"A mechanical weapon and Yuugenshu?"

"No, this is……"

Ilis
Machine crystal responded to Zeadoll's mutter.

"A heavy-arms mechanical weapon from a thousand years ago and……a Yuugenshu. They look the same as they do currently but they're from before Hyouketsu Kyoukai was erected!"

"A thousand year beast. I tried using the memories of the '*Crimson Eye*' and calling it out. I could probably have found something stronger if I searched more but this should be good enough for me to run away."

Tap. Igun-I kicked off the crystal and jumped into the air.

"I won't let you run……muu!"

Zeadoll tried to get to where the pitch black man would land but the Yuugenshu stood in his way.

■ ■, …… ■, ■ ■ ■, ■ …… ■ …… ■ ■ ■, ■, ■ …… ■

Oe/ Dia = U hiz gazzinis sis wei sighn. Quo zess wiz xes kyele.

Mateki.

Before Zeadoll reacted, a torrent of deep purple light radiated from the mist beast.

The particles of light formed a string and the string gathered even more to become a pattern of light. The instant Zeadoll's foot touched that ring of light —— **the deep purple light blew up**.

"……Guu!?"

Assaulted with strong heat and a strong impact and bathed in a curse, the guardian's large body was blown towards the wall.

"Zeadoll!"

"……How rude of him to launch an attack without declaring his name."

The shadow of the man stood up sluggishly within the dense cloud of mateki. Maybe his Sanctuary Arts had kept the damage to a minimum but there were nothing like wounds on his body.

"They're simple phantoms that should disappear in half an hour's time so do your best until then."

Igun-I headed out the door with a light smile.

——Half an hour.

This was no time to say such easygoing words. Ymy and Monica were still in Building Two.

"Just fine, I'll defeat this swiftly and chase after you!"

Sheltis sprinted to close the distance with the mechanical weapon that was drawing nearer to him. It walked on two legs and had a large body close to three metres across with its entire body made of heavy steel.

……As I thought, its movements are dull.

Before the enemy's aim lined up, he jumped to the side by kicking off the ground with one foot.

The mechanical weapon's response was a moment too slow and he used that lull to close the gap in one go. The aim is the joint —— his opponent was a mechanical weapon armored in heavy metal so he'd aim to destroy it starting from the places where that armor was thin.

"*Go up.*"

He jumped off the mechanical weapon's elbow and then off its shoulder. He flew over ten metres high and towards the mechanical weapon's head.

……I see it.

The blue internal parts were peeking out from a gap in its head's armor. Even if it was from a thousand years ago, a mechanical weapon was still a mechanical weapon , and its basic construction was the same. If he destroyed the engine, it would become powerless.

"Sink in!"

He swung his right sword down at the gap. The sword 's blade stabbed into the internal parts……

——Clang!

His sword hit something hard.

The sword won't reach any further than this. Was it stopped by the internal parts shining blue?……no way. Let alone the armor, the internal components which are the weak point shouldn't have this strength.

"*It's a shinryoku carved seal. Just like with the Sanctuary Arts, it's repelling your mateki!*"

"……So that's it!"

The enemy's gun locked on.

"*Pull out your sword!*"

"At a time like this……what a troublesome bastard!"

A heavily armored mechanical weapon specialized for fighting against Yuugenshu. It was originally for mitigating the Yuugenshu's mateki but because his swords were filled with mateki, it was dulling their penetration.

It wasn't at the level of the Sanctuary Arts, but there was no changing that it was troublesome.

"What's a good move?"

"*There is a limit to the shinryoku carved seal. You can erase the shinryoku carved seal by piling on enough consecutive damage. Other than that, I'm reluctant to suggest it but it's the use of mateki. You should be able to nullify the shinryoku carved seal if you use your Seventh True Rhythm.*" *Eden Code*

"……Then we'll go with the first idea."

Somebody from Tenketsu Palace aside, he couldn't use mateki in front of somebody from the Governmental Sector. *Sophia*

"Zeadoll?"

Explosive noises continued behind him. The explosive impact and thunderous sound of him being smacked into the pillars, as well as the guardians anguished voice came to him.

"Gu, this……crafty thing!"

Zeadoll stood up using the mace as a support.

He didn't look like he had any wounds but his expression was grim. Being smacked into the wall

enough that it left cracks, he probably was suffering a light concussion.

■ ■, …… ■, ■ ■ ■, ■ …… ■ …… ■ ■ ■, ■, ■ …… ■

Oe/ Dia = U hiz gazzinis sis wei sighn. Quo zess wiz xes kyele.

Crack.

The floor beneath the Yuugenshu shook and a ring of purple spread like a ripple on water's surface.

"*It's mateki fixation. It's the type that ruptures upon contact and spreads curses.*"

"So it's like a mine. Zeadoll, don't touch that――"

"There's no use in talking about it!"

Holding out the extremely heavy mace, he stepped on the mateki mine.

An explosive sound. Zeadoll's large body was lifted into the air.

"Nuuu!?"

He received the curse shockwave and collided with the wall again.

……It's strange. It's completely different from the masterful fighting he showed yesterday. He looks just like a bewildered Cadet Guard who's fighting against a Yuugenshu for the first time.

"It's the first time I'm fighting a Yuugenshu!"

His stern face became even more like a stone and he rose up.

"……I see."

There was no way Yuugenshu would infiltrate the Holy Hall. It was a given that he wouldn't have an opportunity to fight a Yuugenshu.

"Can you move?"

"You should worry about yourself rather than others!"

A rumble came from directly to the side.

The extremely heavy mechanical weapon causing depressions in the ground was approaching vigorously with the intent to strike him down.

He held out his left arm. He pulled it in as close as possible and spun to dodge. He circled around the exterior and hid around the left flank.

——A flash.

But it only caused a small scrape on the flank's heavy armor. His sword wouldn't reach as far as the crucial parts.

"Tch!"

Running from the gunfire that was sweeping across in a line, he went around and hid in 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye 's' shadow.

"*Neither one of us is in a good situation. I don't want to chock it up to affinity though.*"

"……"

Calming his breathing for the moment, Sheltis bit on his lower lip.

……Ymy and everyone else.

……I'm sorry, bear with it for a little longer.

Part 11

A cloud of dust hung over the area.

In the world of dust from rubble, flashes that made one think of lightning drew arcs.

"_____"

Landing on the rubble piled in the passage and once again jumping off there without a moment's delay.

From the floor to the wall, from the wall to the ceiling, from the ceiling to the floor and then again to the wall. She was closing in using that method which would cause dizziness just by looking at it for a person with a normal sense of balance.

That was the lean spear user who clearly stood out even amidst the dust.

"Heaven Piercing Mother Earth."

The one waiting was the shinryoku practitioner donning an ocher robe.

"Fire a hundred spears."

From underfoot, overhead and to the sides. The bare rock walls that had their paint removed pulsed, and stone spears with a sharp outline flew out all at once. Even if it was wide, it was still a corridor. She couldn't dodge spears approaching from every single direction. But——

Seeing that in front of her, Ishtar didn't stop running or have any hesitation.

"Is just a hundred okay?"

The spear's tip blurred from an instant.

Immediately after, the stone spears all broke apart with a dry sound. Iai. And it was with a sequence of movements at a speed where none of it could be seen.

"A hundred isn't enough."

Four metres until Maha. If she put strength into her step, it was well within her spear's reach. Just before that, the wall directly to the side of Ishtar collapsed.

"!"

A giant forelimb stretched out from the large black hole created by the cave-in. The slimy claw with a brown sheen ripped the shoulder portion of her formal wear —— before her brain registered that, Ishtar jumped in the opposite direction.

A flash while she was flying.

She severed the claw that was sticking to the cut on her formal wear down the middle.

"I see, so you expected that I'd break through the stone spears and set a trap."

She looked at her right arm which was exposed up to near the elbow and smiled. Only the formal wear was torn; there was not a single wound on her smooth flesh. Despite having taken such a perfect surprise attack.

"I haven't had my clothes torn in anything other than a spar with Sennenshi recently. ……You're brought out something quite large."

A giant shadow appeared and broke through the wall to the side without leaving a trace.

An earth dragon. Its mouth could open as much as a person is tall and it had the body size to match. It's black scales were hard enough to deflect steel swords and even a machine gun couldn't do any effective damage. It was a large carnivore that served as the symbol for dangerous species in the Biotope.

"Well, however,"

Standing in front of the beast which let out a roar, Ishtar just shook her head carelessly.

"This isn't all, right? It's not enough, you're not thinking that you can satisfy with just this, right?"

"……"

The two transcendentals glared at each other in that spot where the dragon was raging.

The one who disrupted that unnatural silence was the silent Golden spell caster.

"……It's about time he returned."

"For Sheltis?"

"……Igun-I……it was a whim but……it isn't going to be a hindrance."

Maha said that with absolute confidence.

"I will……not lose. All creation, in other words……no unforeseen incidents……the balance will be kept in this place and be resolved at the other locations."

The other locations.

In other words, the Holy Hall that she'd sent Sheltis to.

Then there was Monica's unit whom she'd entrusted the Priestess' guarding to.

"Therefore, I will just buy time――"

"Shall we make a bet?"

Ishtar's fearless smile cut him off.

敗北は……無し。
万象すなわち……
不測の事項なし

お前の
予言どおりになるか
賭けようか？

――世界に革新（はじまり）を
もたらすのは、
いつだって人の
覚悟だよ

"Whether or not the results for the other locations will be as you've exaggeratedly predicted. I'll bet that you're '*wrong*'. If I get it wrong, then I'll become your subordinate?"

"……"

"The tower is a gathering of weaklings. But they have strong fighting spirits. The Priestesses and Guards alike."

"……So?"

The Cadres Guard silently raised her spear at that question.

"What creates a reform in the world has always been peoples' resolve."

Part 12

Yuumei Space.

Overhead was the shattered chandelier. The paintings that should have adorned the walls all bore traces of claws or fangs and the carpet underfoot was torn here and there, exposing the underlying stone floor.

What filled the large vacant space from which a large number of people had evacuated was the continuous ringing of clashes.

"Kagura, above!"

Monica's shout echoed in the meeting room.

"G-got it……!"

She pulled the trigger on her high voltage electric gun.

With an intense sound and light, the electricity stretched in a line and coiled around the white poisonous snake falling from the ceiling. It's movements stiffened in midair……but it didn't stop with just one shot. Aiming for Kagura below, it extended its fangs and opened its mouth——

"So……persistent!"

Vaiel backhanded its head. Its rope-like thin body was blown away next to the wall and it began changing back to dirt upon hitting the floor.

"Come on, don't space out."

"I-I know that. ……But,"

Kagura tried her hardest to calm her ragged breathing by putting a hand on her mouth.

——It's hard……with three people.

It would be fine if it was somebody other than Sheltis; right now, the important point was having a fourth person.

If they had four people, they could group up with two in the front and two in the back and cover for each other's strengths and weaknesses.

They couldn't do that with the three people they had now, and all three had to be in the frontline to protect the Priestess and General Affairs Bureau Chief's entourage. Because even she who was inexperienced was in the frontline, Monica couldn't concentrate on giving orders.

"Three more left."

Three of Maha's clones were slowly descending from the floor above. There were several poisonous snakes at their feet and red manticores waiting behind them.

"It's the final part……we'll……end it."

But even as she said that, sweat was dropping from Monica's brow like a waterfall. It wasn't just from fatigue , Maha's clone had likely landed a grazing blow on her torso. ……Her face is deathly pale. From her pained hand movements, it's likely that her sternum or a rib cracked in that blow.

"……Monica."

"You don't have time to worry about others."

Vaiel's words pierced her painfully.

……I know that.

……The one most unsuited for direct combat here is me.

That was why Vaiel was sticking close and backing her up and Monica was protecting the opposite direction by herself. The strain on their stamina and mentality was completely different.

Maha's clones floated from the landing above.

Monica prepared her crossed Rosario rods to respond to that —— but her body suddenly swayed.

"Monica!?"

Kagura reached out her hand but it was too far to her location.

Clack. The crossed Rosario rods fell to the ground. But she didn't react to that. Could she be unconscious……? Dizziness. No, did she faint? No matter the case, at this rate……

"Damn it!"

Vaiel clicked his tongue and ran to support her but he was much too slow. The unit leader's body crumpled and Maha's clones were attacking——

"*You……*"

"*You have angered the one person in this world that must not be angered.*"

Yuumei Space was filled with light.

The red warning lamps were dyed anew with the even stronger crimson.

"……Wha!?"

Even Kagura who wasn't a shinryoku warrior knew. The brilliance of shinryoku swirled violently and couldn't be contained within this room.

"_____"

The enemies were pressured into pausing by the incomparable shinryoku.

Within that light, the Priestess held up the female unit captain.

"……This is from my senior Priestess, Meimel."

Wrapping her left arm around the fainted girl's shoulder, she supported her delicate body.

"She said that if a Priestess resolves to head towards the frontline of her own will, then she should say so. That's why……I'll say it."

In front of my eyes, everybody is protecting me and getting hurt.

……I don't want that.

……I don't want to become a Priestess who would just watch that.

Lending her senpai her left shoulder, she pointed at Maha's clones with her remaining right hand.

Then Ymy made a declaration.

"I will be your opponent now."

"……Ymy?"

"Senpai, I'm happy you came to. You suddenly fell over."

She smiled and brought her open right hand to Monica 's right cheek —— and pulled it as hard as she could.

"Fu, fuat ahh hu huing!?" [23]

"It's encouragement. That's a lie, it's punishment to senpai who's a unit leader from me as a Priestess. My earlier words included you, senpai, you know?"

You have angered the one person in this world that must not be angered.

……That's right. There's someone I really want to get angry at.

"Senpai, I'm at my limit for holding back. Senpai…… you really treat me like your kouhai at the crucial times. Do you not see me as a Priestess?"

"Wha-what are you――"

"If the one here were Meimel or Syun-rei, Monica-senpai, you would have probably asked them for assistance. You should know at least how outstanding the defense of a Priestess' barrier is."

She stared intently at Monica who frantically pulled away.

"……"

"Even so, senpai just keeps protecting me. You just say to hide behind you."

Monica was silent as she held a hand to her reddened cheek.

"……You're wrong."

With her head downcast.

"Yes, maybe I would have asked Meimel-sama or Syun-rei-sama for support. But not wanting you to come to the front is……really……"

With her words coming in short bursts, the female unit leader put together her words earnestly.

"My prided kouhai who exerted and worked hard to become a Priestess……in the slim chance that something were to happen……I don't want that."

"**Yes**. **I know**."

「ここにいない
四人目の護士のかわりに、
わたしが先輩の部隊の
四人目になります」

She smiled and picked up the fallen crossed Rosario rods.

“But a Priestess can’t overlook such a kind Guard being hurt.”

To Monica who was looking at her with a blank expression.

Ymy handed over the crossed Rosario rods without a word.

“Let me support my Guard senpai. I have no Sennenshi so it’s my first battle and I don’t know what I should do. That’s why.”

“……That’s why?”

“In place of the fourth Guard who isn’t here, I shall become the fourth member of senpai’s unit. Please command me.”

“Hah!? Wha……th-that’s really……!”

“It’s an emergency measure. A Priestess is saying it’s fine, so it’s fine.”

She stepped in front of Monica looking to defend her.

——I'm going to do it.

The gap created by Sheltis' absence. I don't know just how well I can fill it but I'll do my best.

"Amazing, it's amazing, Vaiel. Did you hear that? A Priestess being a part of our unit, that's completely extraordinary!? It's thanks to Monica collapsing!"

"Really, your worthlessness actually turned out helpful."

"Those two are kind of annoying……saying that somebody who collapsed is worthless."

Monica looked half-shocked as she smiled bitterly.

She took a crossed Rosario rod in one hand and raised the other crossed Rosario rod with her other hand.

"……Just this time, Ymy."

"Yes."

"Support us with barrier-style spells. It'll be fine if you can alleviate or obstruct their attacks. The scope is this

entire room and the targets are limited to the four of us. Can you do it?"

"It would be troubling if you were to underestimate a Priestess."

……Though I'm actually a little weak in barrier-style spells.

Even as she added that in at the bottom of her heart, Ymy replied with a smile.

……It's a spell I'm weak at.

……But I can't fail here.

She would do her utmost to the limit of those feelings.

No matter how difficult and no matter how large-scale , she didn't feel like she could fail.

Part 13

In the Holy Hall filled with light.

The armored mechanical weapon's right arm shined black as it approached.

"*Incoming simultaneous fire from the enemy's large machine gun. Please deflect it as much as possible using your swords.*"

"Eh……wa-wait."

"*It'll hit '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' behind you if you dodge.*"

"You've gotta be kidding me!?"

Staring at the gun barrel in the enemy's right arm, he ascertained the angle that the bullets coming from it would travel at. The revolving ring on the side of the gun slowly began turning——

"*Incoming.*"

"……I know!"

He reverse-gripped his dual swords and lowered his stance.

Then a single sound of gunfire. Sheltis mowed aside the dozens of bullets that came out with that one sound. It wasn't to 'cut' but to 'brush'. It was a technique that used the back of the sword to alter the bullets' trajectories

. Modifications made within the realm of tenths —— he would be shot if he read it wrong.

The gunfire ceased.

Sheltis clashed his sword against the mouth of the gun which was letting off white smoke.

……Looks like it went well.

He could feel dull pain from various places from his shoulder to his arm to his flank. They were wounds from the deflected bullets that had torn his clothes and the surface of the skin beneath.

"*Even though I said to deflect as many as possible, you deflected all of them.*"

"The creator of the '*Crimson Eye*' and Ilis are the same, right? Then you're like sisters. I thought you might not want it to get broken."

"……"

After a not-so-short period of silence.

*"I didn't say it with that meaning, just that the '*Crimson Eye*' would be useful as evidence……idiot……it's not something you have to put your body on the line for."*

"No matter what, it's great that it went well."

He switched back to reverse grip on his swords and sprinted once again.

——Now the only problem is how to defeat this.

His swords couldn't reach the mechanical parts because of the heavy armor and the shinryoku carved seal was rejecting his mateki on top of that. He could defeat it if he took the time but he didn't know how long that would be.

……The method.

"Guuoo!?"

Before he collected his thoughts, Zeadoll's large body was blasted over like a rubber ball. He hit the ground while still holding his mace and a large fissure spread out from there.

"Zeadoll!?"

"You, Sheltis!"

The guardian sprung to his feet with vigor.

"I was wondering what you were doing since a while ago. You didn't defeat that mechanical weapon so it's even getting me involved!"

"That's a coincidence. You just happened to be at the place I led it to so it wouldn't break the '*Crimson Eye*'."

Zeadoll had been at the location he led the mechanical weapon to and it had recognized him as a target too, then hit and sent him flying from behind. If it had been a regular person, their spine and flesh would have been blown to pieces but this man didn't seem to have taken any damage.

"That's not it. I was asking how long you were going to spend in a hard fight with that small fry. That amount of armor is like wet paper to me."

"That's because your mace has power. Me as well, I have the confidence that I can beat that Yuugenshu. If it's a battle against a Yuugenshu……"

He said that much ——— and both of them widened their eyes.

……There is one.

The mechanical weapon and Yuugenshu. A way to clean up for certain these two thousand year beasts that Igun-I had summoned.

"Ah—, that's right……it's an emergency situation so……right?"

"……Mu. Truly, chasing after Igun-I is a priority for both of us. Normally, I'd never conspire with an intruder but……at any rate, it is necessary to hurry."

"*Then it's decided.*"

In response to machine crystal[Ilis]' words, they both turned around.

"I leave that mechanical weapon to you."

"You too, you said it so show me that you can eliminate that Yuugenshu quickly."

Zeadoll of the Governmental Sector would deal with the heavily armored mechanical weapon.

Sheltis of Tenketsu Palace would deal with the Yuugenshu letting out sinister mateki.

——I trust my back to you.

Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace and the Governmental Sector had a long-standing history of opposition and this was their first cooperative battle.

"We'll beat them in thirty seconds and chase after him."

"Twenty seconds is more than enough."

The two ran.

At the same time and in both directions around '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*'.

■ ■, …… ■, ■ ■ ■, ■ …… ■ …… ■ ■ ■, ■, ■ …… ■

Oe/ Dia = U hiz gazzinis sis wei sighn. Quo zess wiz xes kyele.

……Pwoof.

The mateki seething out from the Yuugenshu's entire body created a cloud that reached up to the ceiling.

Rain poured from the mysterious cloud. The mateki condensed into water droplet form fell to the ground and created countless ripples.

Mateki mines. If they were touched, they would spread curses and shockwaves. But——

"Let's go."

"*Right.*"

Sheltis stepped into the middle of those ripples without hesitation.

He threw off the formal wear he'd been wearing.

……Pwoof.

The swaying surface of mateki. The thin film of mateki created a slight splash when he stepped on it……but that was all. The ripples were undisturbed and neither the explosion nor curses were released.

The mateki mines wouldn't react to someone with mateki residing within them.

"!"

The Yuugenshu bent its body with a strange roar. It became more cautious of the human that had slipped past its mateki with mateki of its own and jumped far up to avoid his approach.

"_____"

Sheltis jumped to follow that shadow.

The crimson crystal was spectator to the beginning and end of that part. Claws and his right swords, fangs and his left sword met……

The high-pitched sound of the Yuugenshu's crystal core shattering rang out.

At the exact same time.

Directly below, the guardian's swung mace pierced through the armored mechanical weapon.

Part 14

"……It's the mistake of my life."

Touching her bed hair with her hand, Yuragi let out a long, long sigh.

"To have been knocked out by the rumbling and been sleeping in the waiting room all this time until things were settled."

"It looks like you slept well."

"Yes. I already slept twenty four days' worth……is it okay if I cry?"

"Ahaha, now— now—. Ymy-sama was also uninjured, so it's fine."

Ishtar spoke up with a smile.

But her face was covered with dust and her sleeve was torn starting from the shoulder……

"Ishtar-san……that"

"Mm? Ahh, this got a little torn—. It's just clothing so it'll be fixed with a little sewing, you know?"

The slow way she said things was the same as always.

"Was it from battle?"

"Yup, yup. They ran away halfway through but Ishtar didn't have enough to finish it in one go anyway. On the contrary, it was convenient?"

"……That's hardcore."

Just barely managing to say that, Yuragi once again pulled out her memo book.

"By the way, about the plans after this, we were originally supposed to have a banquet on the fourth and final day of the conference――"

"……I think Yuragi-chan's the one who's hardcore though?"

The Cadres Guard showed a rare bitter smile.

"We'll put aside eating. For now, at least."

"For now?"

Behind them —— Ishtar pointed at the large sofa next to the wall.

"Let them sleep; it looks like they had a lot to deal with too."

"……You're right."

The Priestess Ymy and Guard Monica were sleeping together on the sofa in a friendly manner.

They might be seeing pleasant dreams. They were smiling broadly like one does in happy times.

Interlude – Empty World

Governmental Sector, Central Area, Sector Three, the hangar.

It was a central point where there were usually no checks because of the security equipment and where a great number of guards stood at the gate that served as the only entrance.

There was a single figure that walked through the interior of that hangar without any attempt at hiding himself.

"Yes……there was a hindrance in partway through but it was dealt with using emergency measures. Even if they check the 'Crimson Eye's' records about the research area in question, they won't arrive at any information about us."

The young man had a black communicator at his ear.

He wore a black hat low over his eyes; his attire also consisted of a pitch black suit and pitch black boots. It wasn't the appearance of blending into the shadows but one of becoming a shadow.

"But it was a hard blow to have the underground facility at the research area destroyed. The 'Sleeping Child' that I captured was also defeated and individuals that suitable for the twins' 'experiment' are rare……eh? Then catch another one? Don't say that so easily, it's pretty hard to catch a Yuugenshu."

The corners of his lips rose up beneath the rimmed hat.

"I was the same as always. Maha-san? He dominated from start to finish. It looks like his opponent was strong this time so it seems that puppets are no good after all. It might be a good time for the real him to emerge from the 'Dark Room' but he's pretty shy after all."

The young man didn't try to hide his smile from the other party.

"The twins are continuing the experiment? As harsh as always, haven't they been in the middle of that experiment for around a hundred eighty hours now? Though we wouldn't be able to make a barrier that surpasses Hyouketsu Kyoukai without that. ……Right then, maybe I'll bake a chiffon cake as a reward for their hard work. Eh? You'll help with just the taste testing? Don't say that and help me for real."

"*Ara, then you want me to help you bake? Baking things is my specialty, a really big specialty.*"

A bewitching laugh came from the other side of the conversation.

"It feels like it'll become ashes, so I'll pass on that."

"*Is that so. What a pity.*"

"Then everybody else's schedules are……ara, one of 'Heaven's Wheel' is moving? I see, so some people in the Governmental Sector really have noticed us as well. If so, then our location might have already been discovered using the 'Crimson Eye'. It would be troublesome if that information is supplied to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. ……If they sneak up to our base, we'll grandly welcome them? I see, so it's finally time to come out into the open."

He disconnected the communication.

Putting the device into his suit, he took a single deep breath.

"……I'm happy. I finally got to meet you. Now it can finally start."

It was a whisper like a sigh.

"The frozen time begins to move. The fragments of memory that all have forgotten. The dreams of all the forgotten children. That which sleeps at the bottom of the Garden of Cursed Song <Eden>———"

The wonder-filled monologue permeated the dim hangar. It didn't resound or echo; that voice truly penetrated.

His age, true face, place of origin, strength, goal and real name were all still unknown. All was unknown —— the only hint was that he identified himself as '*Igun-I (Blank World)*'." [24]

"Now, Sheltis, let's sing our story."

In the dark and gloomy area, Igun-I smiled like the Virgin Mary.

Epilogue – Just the Two in the Tower at Midnight

Part 1

Right in the middle of the very long Holy Hall.

What broke the excruciating silence was the hushed voice of a woman.

"What are you doing here, '*Number One*'?"

"A moment of silence."

Keeping his eyes closed and arms crossed, Zeadoll provided an instant response to his ally's question.

"……You're reflecting?"

"Indeed. For this is the first time I have allowed an intrusion of the Holy Hall."

That's why he was having a moment of silence. It was good that the heavily armored mechanical weapon and Yuugenshu had been defeated, but it was a fact that it had taken too long. He had permitted the mastermind, Igun-I, to escape.

"I've heard the story. It sounds like you let the intruder come in contact with the '*Crimson Eye*' and escape after that. Even the senate is viewing it as a problem. By the way, '*Number Nine*' was roaring with laughter."

"Fumu, I am prepared for punishment. ……I'll hit '*Number Nine*' later."

"He's out at the moment."

"'*Number Nine*' is out on a trip?"

"He said he had something to look into. He took along his subordinates and just disappeared."

"So he just left the Governmental Sector without permission. ……Come to think of it, he investigated something with '*Mikuva's Crimson Eye*' a little while ago. When he comes back, I'll ask him. With that out of the way――"

He slightly opened one eye.

He didn't look at the '*Number Seven*' standing to his side but the Holy Hall ahead of him.

"I have an idea about that punishment. So '*Number Seven*', how about we try trading charges? You guard the Holy Hall and I'll watch over yours……"

"Don't mess around."

An angry……more like an astonished tone. He didn't know what face she had on but her expression was likely the same as the ambiance of her voice.

"Like I'd remain in this damp and humid place for even a day. You stay here for your lifetime."

"I don't mind that. But breathing the air outside is also a good thing once in a while. There are warriors like that at Tenketsu Palace."

"You mean Ishtar?"

The Cadres Guard that had been dispatched from Tenketsu Palace as the Priestess' escort. It wouldn't be weird for her to become a Sennenshi at any time. There were even people at the Governmental Sector that were wary because it was more unnatural that she hadn't.

"Wrong."

"……I'm wrong?"

"Umu. But he was skilled. More than that, his eyes showed determination. There are warriors like that in Tenketsu Palace."Sophia

He let out a breath.

"In my personal opinion, there may be a path to reconciliation with Tenketsu Palace."Sophia

"That's a different matter."

The '*Number Seven's*' voice cut him off decisively.

"Come to think of it, why are you here, '*Number Seven*' ?"

"I just came to see the vestiges of battle. I came thinking that I might be able to gauge the enemy's skill but……"

Roughly half of the pillars supporting the ceiling were completely damaged and it was harder to find something that was undamaged. Cracks of various sizes ran across the ceiling and there were large depressions in the ground here and there.

"……It looks to me like all of these traces are yours, you know?"

"I'm bad at holding back."

"……"

"……"

This damn destructive demon —— he felt like he heard the '*Number Seven*' mutter that, but he ignored it.

"Even if you're worthless, you're still of '*Heaven's Wheel*'. I'll lend you the necessary people to repair this place."

"How foolish. I won't accept other people's help to clear my own responsibility."

"I won't know anything if you cry and regret those words, okay?"

"……I guess I'll depend on you."

Part 2

Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace, Floor 65.

The terminal late at night. Glancing at the few night shift workers in the airship control room, it was the time that even the airships, guidance lighting and electronic bulletin board were put to rest——

"Onee-sama!"

In the terminal that was virtually deserted, a single girl ran over with her golden hair fluttering.

"Ah, I'sa-chan!"

Ishtar's face lit up after she descended from the airship . She forcibly hugged to her chest the Regular Guard girl who'd run over.

"Waa, there, there. Has I'sa-chan been a good girl? Onee-chan was so, so worried that bad men would hang around you while she wasn't here!"

"O-Onee-sama……I-I can't breathe. L-Let go!"

"No—pe. I'll hug you a whole week's worth."

The older sister held fast and would let go of her struggling little sister.

"W-wait a second, please, onee-sama. I have to greet the Priestess-sama first. And……I heard that Golden Maha attacked the Governmental Sector."

"Ah, that's right. There might be something like that."

"Priestess Meimel-sama and boss……I mean, Captain Ran and the Instructor with a few others. They were eager to hear about the circumstances upon onee-sama's return. They're already waiting in the meeting room."

"Ehhhh!? I thought I could finally take a break……"

Ishtar's shoulders drooped in disappointment.

"Then I'll go on ahead. Onee-sama, please come afterward."

"'Kay—……we'll do this again later, I'sa-chan."

The older sister weakly waved her hand as she watched her little sister leave. Or so it seemed, but her little sister turned around and bowed spiritedly.

"Now, Ymy-sama, thank you for your hard work!"

"Ah……y-yes! Thank you for your hard work; I'm really thankful."

"No, no, Ishtar should be the one thanking you."

"Heh?"

"Ah, just talking to myself—. Rather than that, you should thank them too."

……Monica-senpai, Kagura-san and Vaiel-san.

In a place a little ways off, the exhausted General Affairs Bureau Chief's group and the Cadet Guards defending them. The three's expressions seemed to be saying, "Finally", as they carried the General Affairs Bureau Chief's group's luggage without saying much.

"Ymy-sama……well then……we'll part ways here ……"

"For I as well……guarding the……General Affairs Bureau Chief's……group until the end is……my job……"

Their parting words were just like an incantation.

"……Everyone's tired so I don't think it's a good time to thank them."

"Right—. Monica-san's unit had that as their first mission and it's the first time the General Affairs Bureau Chief has experienced an attack of that magnitude first-hand, right? Well, everything's an experience."

Ishtar's laughing voice resounded throughout the floor .

……I'm no match for her.

She hadn't slept a good amount for several days and even had a harsh fight with Golden[Maha] at the end, but she still had leftover energy.

"Well then, Ishtar will also head to the meeting room. They're waiting without getting sleep."

"Th-that's right. It sounds like there are some great people at the meeting room."

"I meant I'sa-chan!"

"……"

"It would be terrible if the cute I'sa-chan were to lack sleep so I'll end this meeting or whatever in five minutes! Ahh, jeez, to have a little sister that waits for her onee-chan until this late at night, Ishtar is the happiest person in the world. This excess happiness might make me lack sleep tomorrow too――――"

She spoke heatedly with a clenched fist.

"……Haa."

"Mm, what's the matter, Ymy-sama?"

"No, ……what should I say. I feel like I also understand I'sa-san's feelings. Even though you looked cool when you protected me from Golden[Maha]."

The light in her eyes seemed like it would cut you with just a touch and her voice was low.

It was a little scary but when she stood between them and Golden[Maha], she had unapproachable majesty and pride.

"……Even so."

This change.

It was the same since she'd met her at the terminal several days ago. What was this slack state of hers?

"I feel like I'd like to see the cool Ishtar normally too."

"Ahaha, I'sa-chan also says that oftenn. She says that no matter how much it's to make people let down their guard, onee-sama is playing innocent too much. Ymy-sama, you also think that?"

The Cadres Guard smiled embarrassedly with her tongue poking out.

In response to that childish way of feigning ignorance.

"Yes, if you had asked me up until yesterday, I would have thought so but——"

Ymy shook her head with a smile.

"When you're fighting is the exception and **this right now is your true self, right**? It's not you playing innocent."

A moment.

"……"

Her eyes suddenly sharpened.

"I remember our conversation back at the hotel quite well."

"I'sa, you meaaan? Yes, she's Ishtar's only family in any case."

"I'sa-chan used to have a weak constitution long ago and would immediately get a fever, you know? On top of that, she was very spoiled and would cry while saying, 'It's lonely when onee-chan isn't here!' *when Ishtar went out to get her medicine."*

She took one step towards Ishtar who was staying silent.

The tall woman stared down at her and she stared up at her expression.

"It might have been really hard to look after the previously sickly I'sa-chan that well. ……That's what I thought. It's not something that can be done easily with a simple reason like her being your precious little sister. Your happy face as you talk about I'sa-san can't be you playing innocent."

In place of a mother, a heartwarming smile was needed to comfort her little sister who was sickly as a child.

In place of a father, dignified strength to protect her frail sister was required.

Both sides could be said to be her. However, if it came down to a question of which one was her true self——

"There are probably a lot of people that are mistaken."

"……That's why I don't like you; just when you're playing innocent, you suddenly reveal your true colors."

Those words that Sheltis said.

A large amount of the Guards thought the same.

"*The Guards probably have great respect for the position of Cadres Guard. They can naturally imagine that you'd '*be like this*'. That might be why they feel a sense that your usual carefree attitude is out of place. They think that it doesn't suit the image of a Cadres Guard, it's to have the enemies let down their guard.*"

"……"

"But that's wrong. **When you're fighting is the exception** and I think that the motherly and kind Ishtar-san when with I'sa-san is closer to your true self."

……I somehow have a feeling that I understand.

She was good at looking after kids and also at making meals and snacks.

Even if the given reason was to look after I'sa-chan, the truth is……isn't the truth just that she likes those things?

"I just want you to answer me one thing. This is……a really personal question but, Ishtar-san, you didn't really

want to become a Guard, did you? For example, maybe you would have rather been a kindergarten teacher, a housekeeper, cake store owner or something similar?"

But she had chosen the path of a spear user.

Because there had been something more important than the road she wanted to take.

"I want to confirm that more than anything else."

"……"

She said nothing, her lips remaining a line.

And——

"Who knoows? Ishtar's an idiot so she's already forgotten things from so long agoo."

She slowly turned her back towards her with a half-spin.

"Ah, w-wait! Wait——"

"See ya, Priestess-sama! Here's one more thing from me. I understood over the four day period we were

together but he really does suit Ymy-sama like I thought.
”

“……Who’s he?”

Who is that?

“That’s right, I wonder how many years it’s been. I’ve heard Ymy-sama’s name before, you know?”

The Cadres Guard looked over with a sharp gaze and the corners of her mouth tilted up.

“‘*She’s an apprentice Priestess right now, but Ymy will definitely become a Priestess. That’s why——*’“

“Y-yeah. That’s why……?”

“‘*It’d be the biggest issue for the tower if there were a mischievous, scatterbrained Priestess, so I have to be a Sennenshi to look after her.*’“

“……Sc-scatterbrained!?”

"E-he-he. It's a secret as to who said it〜. Well then, Ymy-sama, see ya—"

The Cadres Guard started to leave. She watched her go without being able to say anything.

It was then that the airship door behind her opened.

"Ah—……jeez! Monica and Kagura and Vaiel! How unfair of them to leave their luggage behind because they 're tired! Does this mean I have to carry this all myself!?"

"*It's your last job.*"

Four peoples' worth including his own and his three comrade's. The boy she knew ran down the steps with nothing but travel bags loaded on his shoulders.

"Oh, Ymy?"

She looked at him blankly and blinked.

"Just standing there like that, did you forget something?"

"……"

"……Ymy?"

"I found him."

In front of her childhood friend who was looking at her face, she clenched her fist.

Then.

"Sheltissss!"

Ymy shouted with her face bright red.

"You're the one who said it! J-just……who's a scatterbrain————!?"

Part 3

Tenketsu Palace (Sophia), Floor 291, '*Paradise*'.

While it was a floor of the tower, there was no ceiling nor walls. The unobstructed white night sky spread overhead and the azure ice walls spread out to the distance below.

Even breathing.

Even the body's warmth.

Even memories, consciousness and anything else, all would freeze in this world.

All manners of protection from the cold were meaningless. All creatures, all substances and Yuugenshu. It was a world of ice which could freeze everything without exception.

"The fifth Priestess has just returned from the Governmental Sector."

She was at the center of this world.

"Ymy Ele Soufflenictole. Even though I took the time, she still can't hear the Forbidden Crystal's voice. She couldn't handle the plan I blessed her with……what a worrisome girl."

She combed her glossy black hair with her hand.

Clinging tightly to her long and slender arm was a pitch black vestment which faithfully mirrored her curvaceous body.

Wrapped in the vestment tailored specifically for her, the woman smiled faintly.

"Right? It's just like a certain somebody from the distant past."

"*……Tsali.*"

In the middle of that area surrounded by the ice walls that spread out.

That voice came from the interior of a particularly large Hyouketsu crystal.

"*Unfortunately I have no recollection of who that could be, so I wonder who it could be?*"

Mature —— compared to that, it was the voice of an extremely young girl.

"Oh, so you were awake."

"*You were too loud so the shinryoku wavelength is getting disrupted. ……What are you going to do if a Yuugenshu manages to penetrate the barrier?*"

"The supervisor of this tower, Queen Salah, would have her shinryoku disrupted with just this?"

Those words could be said to be cool-headed, but her tone remained intimate to the end.

"Even if the Yuugenshu rise to the surface, there is a suitable person to subjugate them."

"*……Sheltis Magna Yehle.*"

"And there's also Ilis for that purpose. It looks like that stubborn machine's calculation abilities haven't declined. There's no problem with practical use."

"*Ilis is energetic. She seems to have devoted herself to support to make up for losing her body as a machine god. It's praiseworthy. Even though when she was supporting you, she didn't really support and kept complaining, but she's now…… sometimes dedicated to the point of causing me unease.*"

Tsali's lips stiffened for the first time with those words that reverberated from within the ice. She silently clenched her right hand that had languidly lowered.

"That's not something I can comment on. ……Well, to begin with, that stubborn machine was more of a

meddler than a machine god. It's a little boring for me though."

"She was a good quarreling opponent for you, after all. —— Mikuva the machine god who stood against a few million Yuugenshu alone. The strongest and final incomplete god-class machine to which the last hope of humanity was entrusted."

"The problem is the two right now, right? What do you think about the essential part from your point of view?"

"……"

A curtain of silence descended upon the world of ice.

Invisible airflow. With a surge that couldn't be called the wind or a blizzard, Tsali's hair fluttered and after the time for that flowed forever.[25]

"It still won't reach. The deepest part of the Garden of Eden Corrupted Song still won't answer."

That was the answer the Queen gave.

"Sheltis Magna Yehle and Ymy Ele Soufflenictole —— the one chosen by the Garden of Corrupted (Eden) Song's mateki and the one who inherited the Baptism of Amaryllis. I wonder if they will live up to expectations."

"*That is dependent on them.*"

"It'll take some time until things start up."

"*Yes, I'm counting on you for continued surveillance. I will contact you if there is a change with the Forbidden Crystal.*"

"Contact, huh……ahh, that's right. Speaking of contacting, I have one other thing to convey."

Tsali's foot that had spun on its heel came to a halt. With a fearless smile that could be seen as provocative spread broadly on her face,

"The third organization attacked the Governmental Sector's '*Crimson Eye*'. Those big-shots —— the Lords of Unusual Books are also moving, so Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace should be prepared for hindrances if they get near the Garden of Corrupted (Eden) Song. I've confirmed five people from the Lords of Unusual Books and they've gathered a

really interesting bunch of members. As far as I could intercept from their telepathy, pillaging Priestesses is also within their plans."

"*So you mention such an important plan as an afterthought.*"

The voice that answered was shocked.

"I'll leave the troublesome things to you. This tower is like your child, right? You deal with it."

"*I will overcome the obstacles. I will absolutely reach the deepest part of the Garden of Corrupted Song.*"

"——It's time; I have plans so I'll be going."

And she turned around once again.

Her black hair that covered her back spread like wings and, with her pitch black vestments, hid her body from view.

"*Business? How unusual. What kind of business?*"

"What, you ask, well that's——"

Finally.

After her black hair that resembled black wings had tapered to a point.

“I have a promise to play with Eyri-nee ♪”

Her innocent young voice echoed throughout the floor called Paradise.

Afterword

****

She continues to protect her absolute sanctuary for the sake of a single family member……

Thank you for picking up this book, I'm Sazane Kei.

I wonder how you liked the fifth volume of '*Eden*'?

It has already been published that the boy who fell to paradise has returned to the tower and formed a unit together with new allies. With that in mind, this time will be an important mission that challenges that unit. This is the first mission with full members so it would be fortunate if it were to come together as a story. Unexpectedly, this is also the heaviest book so far in '*Eden*'.[26]

Also, this fifth book marks a full year for the series. The story is just starting to get going so I'd really like to do my best for next year.

Changing the subject: my new computer

As the title says, I've made a complete one-eighty from my previous laptop and moved on to a desktop computer. The screen's suddenly become so large that it' s actually a little hindering and I was a little bewildered at the difference in how typing felt with the new keyboard, but having the boot-up and software launch speeds faster is really pleasant.

It was the fastest laptop at the time just there's such a difference with just a few years. The development of technology is to be feared.

With this, my manuscripts will be done faster……or they should be, but that's not true for some reason. What a mysteryyy.

About the drama CD

Now then, an announcement about it last volume but this is about '*Eden*'s' drama CD.

The first announcement was in August and it's been four months since then. In that period of time, a book was completed and the seiyuu-sans were decided. Also, as a peculiar nitpick for '*Eden*', we're being particular about the "music" playing in the background.

I envisioned '*Eden*' as a story with a high affinity to music and arias from the onset. The studio, Marine Entertainment-sama, are also matching with that and sending sample BGM to the author (that would be Sazane in this case) and deciding the music to be used in the drama CD based off his feedback.

It's extremely rare for a novel author to be involved as far as the BGM.

I will use this space to thank all those from the studio that's being particular and creating this enthusiastically, Marine Entertainment, the one who was in charge of volume for the drama CD, Tsuyama Touka-sama, the seiyuu-samas that blew "sound" into this story, as well as all those involved in the making of this drama CD.

——Seiyuu Introductions

Sheltis Abe Atsushi-sama Ymy Asumi Kana-sam
Salah
Queen Oohara Sayaka-sama Tsali Sawashiro Mi

Other than that, assistance was received from many seiyuu.

With that, the drama CD will be unveiled on December 29, 2010.

It will be on sale on Marine Entertainment's homepage (limited edition and regular edition) and net shop, can be ordered at all Animate stores and will also be available in CD shops. For details, please visit Marine Entertainment's special homepage: http://www.marine-e.co.jp/sakuhin/fujimi/eden/.

It's a rare chance to mix media so Sazane is also participating excitedly. Please try out the world of '*Eden*'s ' music as well.

Thanks

To my editor K-san who I've really been under the care of for this volume, Kasukabe Akira-san who

produced beautiful illustrations as always even with his super busy schedule, thank you very much!

Above all, to you who have taken this book into your hands, I thank you from my heart!

Thanks to you all, I have been able to do my best for a year now. I hope for you support for the coming year as well.

Next Volume Preview

……This is an isolated world……filled with the Forbidden Crystal……my world.

The girl who stands opposite of the boy who fell to paradise. If you can hear my voice……then I will teach you the true Seventh Heaven (Sophia Code) Rhythm.

The third Priestess and third Sennenshi return to Tenketsu (Sophia) Palace.

The Sennenshi who won't take orders from anyone, Horn Nova, pursues a single Yuugenshu. In that battle, Sheltis and Ymy, as a Priestess, bet their everything.

On the other hand, a strange rumor spreads throughout Tenketsu Palace's tower——

Well then, let's meet once again in March in '*Hyouketsu Kyoukai no Eden 6, Crystal World*'.

Last third of October 2010 http://sazane.e›

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ [T/N: "Elite Guard" has "right now" (いま) over it as the furigana.]
2. ↑ [T/N: "Partner" is written with the kanji for "Ran".]
3. ↑ [T/N: Nobody suggested anything to replace this stupid version of the middle and last names...]
4. ↑ [T/N: The action here is that one in manga where they tap their fist on an open hand.]
5. ↑ [T/N: 飛 which is airship sickness. It sounds really bad like that, so I opted to use the suggestion in the comments.]
6. ↑ [T/N: Now this title given here is pretty ridiculous. It's "祓" which has five kanji in it with the meanings exorcise/purify, spear/weapon, arrive, pinnacle (highest) and person. It should probably have "One who has arrived at/achived the ___" at the beginning, but that sounds pretty bad.]
7. ↑ [T/N: It's the difference between いま and which mean the same thing but the latter is more polite.]
8. ↑ [T/N: 出 is departure. Don't know why they're arriving through a departures gate.]

9. ↑ [T/N: You may notice this sounds strange(?). Emulating the difference in politeness is harder in English since we don't have set forms.]
10. ↑ [T/N: That's asuterizumu (星). It means "seeing the starry night".]
11. ↑ [T/N: The kanji for this is 姫. It's literally " princess lily". For those of you more informed, the part is "yuri". And yes, that kanji combination is -that- yuri.]
12. ↑ [T/N: Not sure how to do this. Eyriey uses 統 which is the Governmental Sector. Yuto uses which is the pronunciation for the kanji (touseichou). It's a way to show that a person doesn't understand the meaning of the words (or are faking that they don't?).]
13. ↑ [T/N: She says 一 at the beginning of both. It marks them as "single" questions. Which isn't used in English so I replaced it with "two".]
14. ↑ [T/N: タ. A blanket for covering yourself when it's hot (whyyyyyyyy). No direct translation that I know of but the word is formed with "towel" and " blanket".]
15. ↑ [T/N: If you have forgotten, sennenshi is written with the characters for "one thousand years" and the first character from "lion". I think CE Translations explained this somewhere.]

16. ↑ [T/N: Partner is written as "personal guard".]
17. ↑ [T/N: She didn't say the "keyword" directly in the Japanese either.]
18. ↑ [T/N: That's 朩 which is pretty much how you say "horn". Holn look more like a name though.]
19. ↑ [T/N: 幽 means pretty much dark and light. The first kanji is actually the first kanji from Yuugenshu. I left it here like this because 1) the meaning isn't clear right now and 2) the meaning is debated just a little past here.]
20. ↑ [T/N: 切 can mean "cut apart" and "cut off". The ceiling is the former, but it's pretty much impossible to cut apart somebody's words.]
21. ↑ [T/N: I feel like this is a huge plot point. But if I state what I noticed here, it'll be too obvious and feel more like a spoiler if I'm right.]
22. ↑ [T/N: Interesting point here is that the kanji for Igun-I is written as "blank" (空) instead of "black" ().]
23. ↑ [T/N: A really messed up version of "What are you doing!?".]
24. ↑ [T/N: So apparently the official spelling for Igneed's name is Igun-I. To go back and change everything I've written with him so far or not to do it...that is the question.]
25. ↑ [T/N: Think "forever in an instant".]

26. ↑ [T/N: He really wrote that Sheltis fell to "paradise ". I didn't make a mistake here.]